Ethics

Basic Science Conference
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University of Tennessee Health Science Center
Ethics

• The study of morals. The part of philosophy that deals with morals
• Morality defines how people ought to behave toward one another
• Goal of morality is to protect the values cherished by society
Ethics

- Ethical Principles
  - Autonomy
  - Paternalism
  - Beneficence
  - Nonmaleficence
  - Justice
  - Respect for others
  - Informed consent
Autonomy

• “Self-rule or determination”
• The individual’s right and capacity to make medical decisions
• Example-A decisionally capable adult refuses recommended medical therapy.
Paternalism

• “Government as by a father over his children”
• The system, principle or practice of managing or governing individuals, businesses, nations, etc., in the manner of a father dealing benevolently and often intrusively with his children.
• Example—mandatory seatbelt laws
Beneficence

• “To do good and seek benefit”
• The state or quality of being kind, charitable or beneficial
• The clinician’s duty to help patients improve their health and quality of life
• Example-Performing an appendectomy for acute appendicitis
Nonmaleficence

• *Primum non nocere.* “First, do no harm”
• The clinician’s duty to avoid doing harm or causing suffering unnecessarily
• Example-A practitioner withdraws advanced nutrition and hydration (ANH) in an advanced dementia patient who must be restrained to maintain placement of a PEG tube
Justice

• The moral obligation of fairness
• Requires clinicians to equitably distribute benefits and burdens and to treat patients who are similar, similarly
• Example-terminally ill patients who are disadvantaged receive advanced nutrition and hydration (ANH) for the same indications as those who are advantaged
Informed Consent

• Legal and Ethical practice based on autonomy which requires clinicians to inform patients about their diagnosis and prognosis, risks and benefits of treatment, and alternatives

• Example-explaining the benefits and burdens of ANH to the surrogates of a patient with advanced dementia prior to its use
Decision-Making Capacity

• Often referred to as “Capacity”

• Determine whether or not patient is psychologically capable of adequate decision-making

• This standard is somewhat subjective
Decision-Making Capacity

• Possess decision-making capacity if:
  – Makes and communicates a choice regarding medical treatment/course of action
  – Patient can appreciate the following:
    • Medical diagnosis and prognosis
    • Alternative courses of care
    • Risks, benefits and consequences of each alternative
  – Patient makes decisions that are consistent with his/her values and goals
  – Decision is not the result of delusions
  – Patient uses logical reasoning to make a decision
Decision-Making Capacity

• Does the patient understand disclosed information?
• Does the patient appreciate the consequences of his/her choices?
• Does the patient use reasoning to make a choice?
• Talk to patient’s family and friends (if available)
• Mental status examinations
• Enhance the ability of the patient to make decisions
• Special circumstances
  – Mental illness
  – Religious beliefs
Competence

• Legal definition
• Mental capacity of an individual to participate in legal proceedings or transactions, and the mental condition an individual must have to be responsible for his or her decisions or acts
• Competence is decision specific
• If an individual is deemed incompetent than a court appoints a guardian or conservator.
• Competence is determined by the courts
Tennessee Health Care Decisions Act
Case

- 19 yo male pushes Ford Explorer up hill after it stalls. He slips and is pinned between truck and tree. He is intubated at scene and brought by air to hospital.
Case

- On arrival, Patient is intubated, sedated from RSI medications. HR-144, BP-84/44. Bruising over left upper quadrant. FAST is positive in both upper quadrants.
Case

• Chaplain comes in to trauma bay, “Parents are here”
• Tell parents that we are going to OR
• “No, you’re not. We’re Pentecostal and so is he. We will pray for him.”
Case

- Go back to Trauma Bay. Patient is now awake.
- Ask patient if he wants breath tube removed. He clearly shakes head “Yes” three times.
- We extubate patient. He states that he doesn’t want surgery or the “salt water in my veins”.
- Allow family and friends in to trauma bay to pray.
Case

• Father asks if I’ve ever seen anyone get better without an operation from this. I answered no. He said “You will.”

• 30 mins go by.

• Patient’s heart rate 144-160-100-60-40-0.

• He dies.

• Father thanks me.
Case

- **Modifiers**
  - Patient is 14 yo
  - Patient’s friend comes to you and states that patient doesn’t share his parents’ beliefs
  - Parents come in after you’re in OR and demand that the operation be stopped.
  - Patient refuses care at scene but is lapsing in and out of consciousness