DEVELOPMENT
OF CLINICAL BIOETHICS

CASES, COMMITTEES
AND CONCEPTS

Harvard Clinical Bioethics Course

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Concepts

• Medical Ethics
  • the analysis and application of moral values and responsibilities in medical practice and research
  • Two problems
    • Only physicians? Or also other health professionals?
    • Only medicine? Or also other life sciences?

• Bio-Medical ethics
• Bioethics (1970)
• **Bioethics** (Greek: *bios*/life + *ethos*/behavior)
  - The systematic study of human conduct in the area of the life sciences and health care in as far as this conduct is examined in light of moral values and principles (Warren Reich STD)

• **Fritz Jahr** (1895-1953) Bioethical Imperative
  - “So that the rule for our actions may be the bio-ethical demand: Respect every living being on principle as a goal in itself and treat it, if possible, as such!” (Fritz Jahr, “Bio-Ethik,” Kosmos 24 (1927): 4)

• **Van Renssalear Potter** (1911-2001) Oncology biochemist (UWM)
  - *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* (1971);

• **Andre Hellegers** MD (1926-1979) (& Sargent Shriver)
  - *Kennedy Institute Center for Bioethics*
Histories must start somewhere

Prior to contemporary codes of ethics and ethics committees in hospitals, there is a long tradition of medical ethics—later, nursing ethics, codes for social workers, psychologists, medical interpreters ...

Hippocrates (460-370 BCE)
Histories must start somewhere

Starting more recently at Harvard…

Dr. Richard Cabot (1869-1939)
“Ethical Forces in the Practice of Medicine” – 1905
Scientific medicine: analysis of autopsies

Willard Sperry (1882-1954)
Dean of Harvard Divinity School
“The Ethical Basis for Medical Practice” - 1950
A case

Joseph E. Murray MD

- **1954** First kidney transplant
- **23 y.o.** identical Herrick twins

*Ethic of “do no harm” challenged by excision of healthy organ from healthy donor for another’s benefit*
A dialysis (ethics) committee

1962

- Seattle Artificial Kidney Center
- Admissions and Policy Committee
- Selected dialysis patients on basis of social worth

Shana Alexander, “They decide who lives, who dies: Medical miracle and a moral burden of a small committee,” *LIFE magazine*, 9 November 1962; 102-125
Historic Ethics Committees

Henry K. Beecher (1904-1976)

1966 Ethics and Clinical Research
- “Laid ethical foundations for clinical research”
- Cited 22 cases of unethical practices in medical experimentation
- Suggested journal editors reject research that violates human rights

1968 Harvard Brain Death Committee
- Stranded on mechanical ventilators
- Linked to organ procurement

1974 National Research Act – Research Ethics Committees
- IRBs
- Nat’l Commission for Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research

Hospital Ethics Committees

• 1976  Quinlan case (NJ Supreme Court)
  • Prognosis ethics committees

• 1984  Ethics Committees recommended by:
  • American Hospital Association
  • Academy of Pediatrics
  • American Medical Association
  • American Academy of Neurologists
  • National Hospice Organization…and others

• 1987  Ethics Committees in 60% of hospitals
  • Education for ethics committee members

• 1992  mandated by JCAHO

• 2000  95% reported offering ethics consultation

• 2016  “Quality Attestation” of HCEC
What do you need to know to serve on an ethics committee?

1. Something about ethics!
2. What’s an ethics consult?
3. Tips on tough topics
4. Resources
5. Foresight—looking ahead
about ethics...

The most basic question:

What ought I to do?

• Conduct
• Character
• Community
Concepts

Metaethics

Relativism    Absolutism

NORMATIVE ETHICS

Formalism    Utilitarianism

Prima Facie Duties
Non maleficence, Beneficence, Fidelity Justice, Reparation, Self-Improvement…

Utility Principle
Greatest good for the greatest number

Is it ethically justifiable to ________?

What do we mean when we say a decision is right?

How do we know an act is right?
What do you need to know to serve on an ethics committee?

1. Something about ethics!
2. What’s an ethics consult?
What is an ethics consult?

...a set of services provided by an individual or group in response to questions from patients, families, surrogates, health care professionals, or other involved parties who seek to resolve uncertainty or conflict regarding value laden issues that emerge in health care [ASBH]
What about tough topics?

- Children
- Rationing
- Medical Futility
- Genetics
- Euthanasia
- Mentally ill
- Coma
- Mistakes
Where can I get help?

Resources: Bioethics Literature
Where can I get help?

• Professional Associations

• Centers and Institutes of Bioethics

• US: Presidential Commission
Looking ahead....

What does the future hold for the field of bioethics?
Questions? Comments?