Ethical Decision Making in Healthcare

LDST 377-01

Spring 2009

Course Syllabus

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to some of the central ethical issues associated with decision making in medicine and healthcare. We begin with a discussion of the place of truth and informed consent in medical treatment and experimentation. Doing so will allow us to lay out the competing normative frameworks on which we will rely for the rest of the course. In particular, we will look at the ways in which the values of autonomy and well-being come to bear on medical decision making. This starting point also highlights a critical question that will arise periodically in our study of bioethics: is there something distinctive about the application of morality in medical contexts? For example, do moral requirements apply to physicians in the same way that they apply to the rest of us, or are medical leaders exceptional in some morally relevant sense? Next, the course considers the value of life and, specifically, the morality of abortion and euthanasia. These issues raise a second critical question of leadership: what characteristics are necessary for membership in the moral community? For example, do fetuses have moral status? Can people voluntarily give up their membership in the moral community, and can it be revoked if they lose their “personhood?” We then take up ethical problems surrounding the issues of resource allocation—especially, organ donation. We conclude with a discussion of animal experimentation, which also raises questions of moral membership.

All students are expected to accept responsibility for understanding, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings and the classroom. Classes will assume that students have completed all of the assigned readings, and I will regularly ask you to make contributions to the class based on your reflections on what you have read. My expectations for intellectual engagement
are thus quite high. I expect not only deep thinking and analytical writing but also active, insightful participation in the classroom. Part of your grade will be determined by your contribution to our discussions. Please also note that class begins and ends on time.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- The student should develop an intellectually sophisticated understanding of the distinctive ethical issues associated with medical leadership and healthcare.
- The student should be able to articulate the competing views surrounding morally contentious healthcare issues.
- The student should be in a position to recognize the central moral values that come to bear on medical decision making in particular cases.
- The student should learn how to critique moral arguments and how to present moral arguments of her own.
- The student should become familiar both with the particular moral perils associated with medical leadership and with the causes of these perils—for example, disparities in status, information, and ability; indeterminacy with respect to membership in the moral community; scarcity of resources; and disagreements about value and the criteria for personhood.

**REQUIRED TEXT**

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class contribution $^{2}$  10%
2. Paper 1  20%
3. Midterm exam  20%
4. Paper 2  20%
5. Final examination  30%
6. Community-based learning requirement $^{3}$  P/F

EXTENSIONS AND MAKE-UP EXAMS

I take deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any difficulties that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. No late work will be accepted, unless accompanied by a completed and approved request form. The form can be found attached to this syllabus. It cannot be used for weekly essays. Please note that computer problems never constitute an acceptable excuse.

$^{1}$ The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. Every piece of written work must have the honor pledge and the student’s signature on it. The pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.” I reserve the right to refuse to accept any work submitted without the honor pledge.

$^{2}$ To facilitate class contributions, I will ask you to write weekly essays directly on the readings. They should take the following form: 1 single-spaced, typed page, consisting of at least 600 words, per week for 10 weeks. Failure to conform to these requirements will result in a loss of credit for your work. Essays must be posted to blackboard by **5:00 p.m. on Monday** for Tuesday’s class and **5:00 p.m. on Wednesday** for Thursday’s class. Punctual and full class attendance is also required for essay credit. You may not use the request for extension/make-up for weekly essays. Schedule changes may affect the days on which your weekly essays are due.

$^{3}$ Students will complete a 10-hour community-based learning requirement—in addition to a 4-hour training and orientation session—in hospice care. They will also be asked to complete a criminal background check. The purpose of this CBL requirement is to enrich student learning and to inform our thinking about central values discussed in the course: autonomy, well-being, and life.
GRADING LEGEND

A+ 97-100
A 93-96
A- 90-92
B+ 87-89
B 83-86
B- 80-82
C+ 77-79
C 73-76
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D 63-66
D- 60-62
F 50-59

If you need accommodations for any of the assessments, please contact the instructor during the two weeks of classes.

SCHEDULE (subject to change as the course progresses)

I. Truth-Telling in Medicine

T 1/13  Kant, “On the Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives,” p. 603

W 1/14  WEEKLY ESSAY 1 (Group A)

R 1/15  Collins, “Should Doctors Tell the Truth?” p. 605

T 1/20  Inauguration Day

W 1/21  WEEKLY ESSAY 1 (Group B)

R 1/22  Higgs, “On Telling Patients the Truth,” p. 611

II. Informed Consent

M 1/26  WEEKLY ESSAY 2 (Group A)

        Elliott, “Amputees by Choice,” p. 625
W 1/28             WEEKLY ESSAY 2 (Group B)

S 1/31            Hospice Orientation (12:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.)
M 2/2          WEEKLY ESSAY 3 (Group A)
T  2/3  Savulescu, “Rational Desires and the Limitation of Life-Sustaining
           Treatment,” p. 646

W 2/4          WEEKLY ESSAY 3 (Group B)
R  2/5  Macklin, “The Doctor-Patient Relationship in Different Cultures,”
           p. 664

III. Possible People and Abortion

M 2/9          WEEKLY ESSAY 4 (Group A)
T  2/10  Hare, “The Abnormal Child: Moral Dilemmas of Doctors and
         Patients,” p. 329

W 2/11          WEEKLY ESSAY 4 (Group B)
R  2/12  Parfit, “Rights, Interests, and Possible People,” p. 108
M 2/16          WEEKLY ESSAY 5 (Group A)
T  2/17  Parfit (con.)
W 2/18          WEEKLY ESSAY 5 (Group B)
R  2/19  Finnis, “Abortion and Health Care Ethics,” p. 17
F 2/20          PAPER 1 DUE (5:00 p.m.)
M 2/23          WEEKLY ESSAY 6 (Group A)
T  2/24  Tooley, “Abortion and Infanticide,” sections I-III, VI
IV. End-of-Life Issues

M 3/16  WEEKLY ESSAY 7 (Group B)


W 3/18  WEEKLY ESSAY 8 (Group A)


M 3/23  WEEKLY ESSAY 8 (Group B)

T 3/24  Nesbitt, “Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die?” p. 292
Kuhse, “Why Killing is Not Always Worse—and Sometimes Better Than Letting Die,” p. 29

W 3/25  WEEKLY ESSAY 9 (Group A)

R 3/26  Million Dollar Baby
Chris Hill, “The Note,”

M 3/30  WEEKLY ESSAY 9 (Group B)


W 4/1  WEEKLY ESSAY 10 (Group A)

V. Resource Allocation and Organ Donation

M 4/6  WEEKLY ESSAY 10 (Group B)

T 4/7  Kluge, “Organ Donation and Retrieval: Whose Body is it Anyway?” p. 483
Menzel, “Rescuing Lives: Can’t We Count?” p. 407

W 4/8  WEEKLY ESSAY 11 (Group A)

R 4/9  Veatch, “How Age Should Matter: Justice as the Basis for Limiting Care to the Elderly,” p. 437

M 4/13  WEEKLY ESSAY 11 (Group B)

Moss and Siegler, “Should Alcoholics Compete Equally for Liver Transplantation?” p. 421

VI. Experimentation with Animals

W 4/15  WEEKLY ESSAY 12 (Group A)

R 4/16  Kant, “Duties Towards Animals,” p. 564
Bentham, “A Utilitarian View,” p. 566
Singer, “All Animals are Equal,” p. 568

F 4/17  PAPER 2 DUE (5:00 p.m.)

M 4/20  WEEKLY ESSAY 12 (Group B)

T 4/21  Singer (con.)

R 4/23  Course Summary and Discussion

F 4/24  Last Day of Classes

S 5/2  Final Exam (2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.)
REQUEST FOR EXTENSION/MAKE-UP  
(not to be used for weekly essays)

1. Today’s Date:

2. Original Assignment Date:

3. Reason for Extension/Make-up:

4. Proposed Due Date/Make-up Date:

5. Instructor Signature:

6. Your Signature:

Submit this form with the completed assignment (e.g., paper, make-up exam, etc.). This form will not be accepted if incomplete (e.g., if #5 is blank).