INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL ETHICS
1st year

L1

Introduction

1-Since the founders of medical ethics, such as Hippocrates, published their works more than 2000 years ago, the medical profession has undergone incredible scientific and social transformations.

2-Modern healthcare has given rise to extremely complex ethical dilemmas which all too often Healthcare Practitioners are unprepared to manage these competently.

3-Healthcare Practitioners know what a privilege it is to be involved in the patient-physician relationship, a unique relationship where scientific knowledge meets care within a framework of ethics and trust.

4-Most medical associations acknowledge in their foundational policies that ethically, the best interests of the individual patient should be the first consideration in any decision on care – ''patient-centred care''.

5-You will be expected to undertake individual ethical reflection as well as discussion within group settings.

6-This course serves to prepare you to better navigate through the many ethical challenges faced in daily medical practice in finding effective ways for PUTTING THE PATIENT FIRST.

WHAT IS ETHICS?

"…ethics is the study of morality – careful and systematic reflection on and analysis of moral decisions and behaviour"

1- Ethics is the study of morality – careful and systematic reflection on and analysis of moral decisions and behaviour, whether past, present or future

2-Morality includes nouns such as 'rights', 'responsibilities' and 'virtues' and adjectives such as 'good' and 'bad' (or 'evil'), ''right' and 'wrong', 'just' and 'unjust

Ethics is primarily a matter of knowing whereas morality is a 3matter of doing

4-Ethics deals with all aspects of human behaviour and decision-making, it is a very large and complex field of study .with many branches and subdivisions

WHAT IS MEDICAL ETHICS?

1. **Medical Ethics** deals with moral issues in medical practice.
2. It looks at *Healthcare Practitioner* **behaviour** and **decision-making** – not scientific or technical questions such as how to treat diabetes or how to perform a double bypass, but questions about *values*, rights and responsibilities. Healthcare Practitioners face these kinds of questions as often as scientific and technical ones.
3. Some ethical questions in medicine are relatively easy to answer, mainly because there is a well-developed *consensus* on the right way to act in the situation (for example, the Healthcare Practitioner should always ask for a patient's consent to serve as a research subject).

4. Others are much more difficult, especially those for which no consensus has developed or where all the alternatives have drawbacks (for example, rationing scarce healthcare resources).

WHY STUDY MEDICAL ETHICS?

These are some of the common reasons given for not assigning ethics a major role in the medical school curriculum. Each of them is partially, but only partially, valid.

"As long as the Healthcare Practitioner is a knowledgeable and skilful clinician, ethics doesn't matter."

"Ethics is learned in the family, not in medical school."

"Ethics is important, but our curriculum is already too crowded and there is no room for ethics teaching."

"Medical ethics is learned by observing how senior Healthcare Practitioners act, not from books or lectures."

1-Medical schools are realising students need adequate time and resources for learning ethics.

2-Organizations such as the World Medical Association and the World Federation for Medical Education strongly encourage increased focus on Medical ethics learning.

3-Ethical principles such as respect for persons, informed consent and confidentiality are fundamental to the physician-patient relationship.

4. Application of these principles in specific situations often problematic, since healthcare personnel, patients and their families may disagree about what is the right way to act in a situation.
5. Studying Medical ethics prepares Healthcare Practitioners to recognize difficult situations and deal with them in a rational and principled manner.
6. It is also important in Healthcare Practitioners' interactions with society and their colleagues and for the conduct of medical research.

MEDICAL ETHICS, MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LAW

1. Medical ethics greatly influenced by developments in **human rights**. In a multicultural world, with different moral traditions, the major international human rights agreements can provide a foundation for medical ethics that is acceptable across national and cultural boundaries.
2. Healthcare Practitioners frequently have to deal with medical problems resulting from violations of

human rights, such as forced migration and torture. And they are greatly affected by the debate over whether healthcare is a human right, since the answer to this question in any particular country determines to a large extent who has access to medical care.

"…often ethics prescribes higher standards of behaviour than does the law, and occasionally ethics requires that physicians disobey laws that demand unethical behaviour"

3. Medical ethics is also closely related to **law**.
4. Most countries have laws that specify how Healthcare Practitioners are required to deal with ethical issues in patient care and research.
5. Medical licensing and regulatory officials in each country can and do punish Healthcare Practitioners for ethical violations.

6. But ethics and law are not identical.
7. Often ethics sets higher standards of behaviour than does the law, and occasionally ethics requires that Healthcare Practitioners disobey laws that demand unethical behaviour.

8. Laws differ significantly from one country to another while ethics is applicable across national boundaries.