2nd Lecture

PRINCIPLE FEATURES OF MEDICAL ETHICS

Principle features of medical ethics are the basis for making moral decisions. These principles applies to particular cases or situations in order to determine what is the right thing to do, taking into account both rules and consequences.

Principlism has been extremely influential in recent ethical debates, especially in the Medical Practices. They have been identified as the most important for ethical decision-making in medical practice.

Principles do indeed play an important role in rational decision-making. However, the choice of these four principles, and especially the prioritisation of one of them over the others, is a reflection of country culture and is not necessarily universal. Moreover, these four principles often clash in particular situations and there is a need for some criteria or process for resolving such conflicts.

The four major principles commonly used in healthcare ethics are,

1. **Autonomy**
2. **Beneficence**
3. **Nonmaleficence**
4. **Justice**

These principles provide healthcare with an additional foundation and tools to use in making ethical decisions. Each of these principles is reviewed in the following:

1. **Autonomy:** the word is from Greek, the term **auto** means "self", and the **nomos** means "rule" or "law".

This principle is focused on the patient's independence or freedom. A competent adult has the right to make decisions about what happens to his body. The person must be capable of rational thought and not be manipulated or intimidated into any decision. An adult can refuse medical care or treatment or accept treatment when his provider suggests it. That person then lives with the consequences of his decision.

2. Beneficence:

Beneficence is a fundamental principle of healthcare ethics, beneficence implies more than just avoiding doing harm. It suggests a level *of (altruism) humanity* that is absent from simply *(refraining) hold back* from harm. The ethical principle of having to engage in altruistic or beneficent acts means that people working in the medical are morally obligated to take positive and direct steps to help others.

Health care is different in term of the common morality, the larger society does not necessary hold people as negligent or deficient for failure to perform beneficent acts. However, in healthcare the professional roles carry that expectation. Acts of kindness and courtesy not expected by typical stranger, but, are expected of healthcare workers.

For example, failure to open a door to help someone in a wheelchair may be discourteous in most setting or perhaps rude. However, it is unprofessional if you are a healthcare worker.

Beneficence is part of the common morality of health care.

This principle states that a physician must act in the best interest of the patient. Providers are required to promote their patient's health and well-being. Most doctors agree that healing is the main purpose of modern medicine. Beneficence means providers must help their patients.

3. **Nonmaleficence:**

"First, do no harm, benefit only". Physicians must not harm a patient through carelessness, malice, vengeance, or dislike, or even through treatments intended to help the patient. This principle is balanced with beneficence in that any risks of a treatment or procedure to a patient must be outweighed by benefit. Some treatments always carry a risk of harm. But when the treatment is very risky, the benefit must be great, or the risk of not performing the procedure must be great.

What is Harm in the Clinical Setting?

In the clinical setting, harm is that which worsens the condition of the patient. However much of healthcare involves pain, discomfort, inconvenience, expense and sometimes even disfigurement and disability. This called effects, harm was justified in these cases, because there is a greater good. The greater utility, occurs from accepting the pain or dismemberment as part of the cost to get the benefit the healthcare procedures promised.

What is effect?

It is an offshoot of nonmaleficence. A treatment that is normally used to help someone may have an unintended negative effect. For instance, a vaccine used to prevent disease can, in rare cases, actually cause the

infection it is intended to prevent. This principle provides specific guidance when determining when unintended effects are justified and when they are not.

4. Justice:

Justice refers to fairness with respect to the distribution of medical resources. This principle draws upon ethics, the law, and public policy. Who should receive scarce medical resources, and how should we distribute them in order to realize the best outcomes? Making the system as a whole more fair is one of the goals of justice.

There are two other values of medical ethics: truthfulness (or honesty) and dignity. Although these are important qualities, they are more standards of conduct, not overarching ethical principles.

Even with all of these principles and tools at our disposal, medical ethics can be complicated and sometimes messy. There will be times in practice where doctors and patient will simply not be able to decide on one course of action or agree about a treatment. Sometimes, all we can do is try to think clearly about what is ethical, then decide on a path, act, and hope for the best.

Reference

3- ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

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