Ethics & Values Unit
Unit Directors: Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

Overview:

Although issues of ethics and values have always been a part of medical practice, a major change occurred at the beginning of the 1960’s with the advent of the bioethics movement. As a result of technological advances occurring within medicine and social and cultural changes occurring outside of medicine, the public began to pose new questions that raised ethical issues. Who should make decisions at the bedside – the physician or the patient? What should be done in cases where the patient lacks the capacity to participate in such decisions? How should the new technological resources – such as kidney dialysis, transplant organs and ICU beds – be allocated? Moreover, was it appropriate to devote major financial resources to expensive scientific advances, particularly when so many Americans lacked basic health care? Finally, if medicine was now able to prolong life much longer than ever before, was this always the correct choice?

In addition to raising these clinical issues, the recent upsurge in interest in bioethics has prompted a reexamination of the proper professional role of the physician. Becoming a physician entails the establishment of professional relationships not only with patients but also with colleagues, employers and government. In an era of rising health care costs and growing managed care arrangements, these relationships are coming under increasing scrutiny. How should physicians balance their fiduciary responsibility to patients with growing demands to limit financial expenditures? Should physicians accept gifts from pharmaceutical companies or do such gifts undermine their clinical objectivity? Should physicians be able to refer patients for diagnostic evaluations at medical facilities in which they have a financial interest?

These sessions on ethics and values are designed to introduce you to the myriad complex issues that constitute contemporary bioethics. One result of the growth of bioethics has been the increasing participation of specialists, known as “bioethicists,” in clinical decision-making. These individuals include philosophers, theologians and lawyers, as well as physicians and other health care providers. Most major medical centers now have standing ethics committees to address difficult ethical issues and provide consultation on specific cases. Although bioethicists provide important expertise at the bedside, it is incumbent that all future physicians become comfortable dealing both with ethical problems in the clinical setting and in professional medical ethics. These sessions will serve as the first segment of ethics and values training that you will receive during your four years at P&S.

Objectives:

1. To explore the historic role of ethics and values have played in the practice of medicine, and to learn about the rise of bioethics.

2. To discuss what it means to be a doctor in the 21st century. How are the privileges and responsibilities of the physician to be balanced with the growth of patient autonomy and managed care medicine?

3. To look at the ethics of clinical experimentation. How should the competing pressures to create therapeutic innovations be balanced with the care of the patient?

4. To discuss the probable impact of health care reform and managed care on the physician-patient relationship, the academic medical center, and the careers of physicians.
5. To explore the ethical implications of the physician-patient relationship. How should physicians respond if they suspect that their colleagues are impaired or performing unsatisfactory work?

6. To understand medical ethics in the context of birth and death. When does the ability to prolong life become a burden to patients as opposed to a benefit? Who should decide when such a point has been reached?

**Ethics & Professionalism**

Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Objectives:**

- To explore the ethical principles that underlie medical practice: autonomy, beneficence and justice
- To learn about the history of medical ethics, particularly the shift from “medical etiquette” to bioethics
- To discuss the relevance of the Hippocratic Oath to modern medicine
- To learn about recent efforts to enhance the professionalism of physicians
- To understand the particular ethical issues that confront medical students

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Medical Decision-Making**

Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Objectives:**

- To learn about the historical transition from physician-based paternalism to patient autonomy
- To discuss the role of patient activism and the Internet in altering the doctor-patient interaction
- To learn how issues of gender and race influence the doctor-patient relationship
- To discuss recent challenges by physicians to the autonomy model
Readings:

Gawande, A.


**Exploring Confidentiality and other Boundaries**

Barron Lerner, M.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Objectives:**

- To explore why confidentiality has historically played such a central role in the physician-patient relationship.
- To examine the caregiver’s obligation to preserve confidentiality in situations when a patient’s behavior poses a potential risk to others.
- To discuss threats to patient information raised by the growth of computer technology and managed care.
- To discuss the proper boundaries that should exist within the doctor-patient relationship.
- To explore boundary issues that may arise for medical students on the wards.

**Recommended Reading:**


**End of Life Challenges**

Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Overview:**

In this session, we will discuss the role of the physician in easing the dying process. Most patients (as well as family members) go through phases of shock, denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and, hopefully, acceptance. Their needs from their caretakers differ at each phase of this process. Physicians need to be acquainted with this process, learn how they themselves can accept death, and be able to meet the needs of patients appropriately.

**Objectives:**

- To understand how the growth of the hospital and technology during the twentieth century markedly changed how Americans die
- To learn about the phases of dying and how physicians can ease pain and suffering
- To become familiar with hospice care and palliative medicine
- To learn about advance directives, such as living wills and health care proxies
- To become familiar with the term "medical futility," and the use of this concept to limit prolonged end-of-life treatments

**Required Reading:**

Behavioral Medicine in Primary Care: Chapter 35: Death & Dying


**Health Systems: Compensation Versus Altruism**

Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Objectives:**

- To learn about the role played by money in the history of medicine
- To learn how models of the doctor-patient relationship have changed over time
- To assess the impact of health care reform and managed care on the physician-patient relationship
- To discuss the ethical impact of “practice parameters” which provide algorithms for physicians to work-up specific clinical problems
- To explore the temptation of certain physicians to “game the system,” lying in order to benefit their patients
- To explore the controversial side of industry in supporting research at academic medical centers.

**Required Reading:**

Understanding Health Policy: Chapter 2: Paying for Health Care

Understanding Health Policy: Chapter 13: Medical Ethics & the Rationing of Health Care


**Health Systems: Rationing**

Barron Lerner, M.D., Ph.D., David Rothman, Ph.D.

**Objectives:**

- To understand the history of rationing in medicine, from kidney dialysis to organ transplantation
- To learn how hearts, livers, kidneys and other scarce organs are currently rationed
• To explore the ethics of selling organs in the Third World
• To review the unsuccessful efforts of Oregon to ration care for its Medicaid patients

Readings:

Article by Dr. Rothman on selling of organs