

# **Medical ethics**

**Introduction to basic principles**

# **Ethics are not ...**

- **Ethics is not the same as feelings**
- **Ethics is not religion**
- **Ethics is not following the law**
- **Ethics is not following culturally accepted norms**
- **Ethics is not science**

# Ethics are ...

- **Moral Principles**
- **What is good and bad**
- **What is right and wrong**
- **Based on value system**
- **Ethical norms are not universal – depends on the sub culture of the society**

**ethics refers to standards of behavior that tell us how human beings ought to act in the many situations in which they find themselves**

**as friends, parents, children, citizens, businesspeople, teachers, professionals, and so on.**

# Historically

- **medical ethics may be traced to guidelines on the duty of physicians such as the Hippocratic oath**

**a physician must recognize responsibility to patients first and foremost, as well as to society, to other health professionals, and to self. These are not laws, but standards of conduct which define the essentials of honorable behavior for the physician**

# Four basic Principles of Medical Ethics

- **Autonomy**
- **Beneficence**
- **Non maleficence**
- **Justice**

# Autonomy

- Patient has freedom of thought, intention and action when making decisions regarding health care procedures
- For a patient to make a fully informed decision, she/he must understand all risks and benefits of the procedure and the likelihood of success.



- **Always respect the autonomy of the patient - then the particular patient is free to choose**
- **Such respect is not simply a matter of attitude, but a way of acting so as to recognize and even promote the autonomous actions of the patient.**
- **The autonomous person may freely choose loyalties or systems of religious belief that may adversely affect him**

- **The patient must be informed clearly the consequences of his action that may affect him adversely.**
- **Desiring to "benefit" the patient, the physician may strongly want to intervene believing it to be a clear "medical benefit." The physician has a duty to respect the autonomous choice of the patient, as well as a duty to avoid harm and to provide a medical benefit.**

- **But the physician should give greater priority to the respect for patient autonomy than to the other duties.**
- **However, at times this can be difficult because it can conflict with the paternalistic attitude of many health care professionals.**

- **In the case of a child, the principle of avoiding the harm of death, and the principle of providing a medical benefit that can restore the child to health and life, would be given precedence over the autonomy of the child's parents as surrogate decision makers.**

# Beneficence

- **The practitioner should act in “the best interest” of the patient - the procedure be provided with the intent of doing good to the patient**

- **This needs health care provider to,**
  - **develop and maintain skills and knowledge by continually updating training**
  - **consider individual circumstances of all patients**

# Non maleficence

- **“Above all, do no harm,” – Make sure that the procedure does not harm the patient or others in society**

- **When interventions undertaken by physicians create a positive outcome while also potentially doing harm it is known as the "double effect."**

**Eg,. the use of morphine in the dying patient. eases pain and suffering while hastening the demise through suppression of the respiratory drive**



- **Physicians are obligated not prescribe medications they know to be harmful.**
- **Some interpret this value to exclude the practice of euthanasia**
- **Violation of non-maleficence is the subject of medical malpractice litigation**

# Medical malpractice

- **An act or omission by a health care provider that deviates from accepted standards of practice in the medical community which causes injury to the patient.**

# Justice

- **The distribution of scarce health resources, and the decision of who gets what treatment “fairness and equality”**
- **The burdens and benefits of new or experimental treatments must be distributed equally among all groups in society**

- **The four main areas that Health care provider must consider when evaluating justice**
  - 1. Fair distribution of scarce resources**
  - 2. Competing needs**
  - 3. Rights and obligations**
  - 4. Potential conflicts with established legislations**