Ethical Issues in End-of-Life Care

In the past 50 years, medicine has developed new and unprecedented technologies like breathing machines and dialysis that can prevent or delay death. These technologies have changed how people die, where people die, and physicians’ responsibilities to dying patients. During these 50 years, physicians and society have gradually learned how to best apply these life-saving technologies and how to stop them. In the vast majority of cases in which death is anticipated, patients, families and physicians reach prudent and “negotiated” decisions on when to stop aggressive care.

Yet questions remain. Advance directives have not been the panacea they were hoped to be and deciding for patients who are unable to speak for themselves remains painfully difficult for families and practitioners. Newer technologies such as implanted cardiac defibrillators, left ventricular assist devices, extracorporeal membrane oxygenation continue to raise new questions. Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide remain contentious subjects. Even questions that were thought settled, such as brain death and palliative sedation, have generated new controversies. Further, the cost of caring for patients at the end of life continues to consume a large percentage of the health budget, raising questions about the optimal and just use of health care resources.

In these seminars, local and national experts will address these and other controversial ethical issues in care at the end of life. While much has happened in the past 50 years, the age-old issues of suffering, death, caring, and the limits of medicine have found new expressions that require new answers. This year’s interdisciplinary seminar series was organized by Mark Siegler, the Director of the MacLean Center for Clinical Ethics and Daniel Sulmasy, Associate Director of the MacLean Center. The conference organizers hope that these discussions will help to shape debate about these critically important questions at the University of Chicago and across the wider society.

Thirty-Three Years of MacLean Center Ethics Seminars

In 1981, under the auspices of the MacLean Center, Mark Siegler and Richard Epstein organized a yearlong interdisciplinary seminar series on Medical Innovation and Bad Outcomes: Legal, Social and Ethical Responses. The success of that initial seminar program demonstrated that there was great interest at the University of Chicago in creating a sustainable interdisciplinary forum to discuss health-related subjects with colleagues from across campus. Each year since 1981, the MacLean Center has sponsored an annual seminar series that has examined the ethical aspects of one key health related issue. Previous topics have included: Organ Transplantation, Pediatric Ethics, Global Health, Health Care Disparities, Medical Professionalism, Confidentiality, Pharmaceutical Innovation and Regulation, and Health Reform. In 2014-2015, our topic is Ethical Issues in End-of-Life Care.

The MacLean Center would like to thank the following institutions for their assistance in co-sponsoring selected lectures in the series:

For more information and for special assistance, please contact Christian Lowe at (773) 834-0683 or email Christian at cloe1@medicine.bsd.uchicago.edu.

To learn more about the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics or to register for future MacLean Center events, please visit our website at macleanethics.uchicago.edu.

Videos from this seminar series will be available within two weeks of the lecture on our YouTube site at youtube.com/user/MacLeanCenter.

For live updates about the seminar series, follow the MacLean Center on Twitter at @MacLeanEthics.
Autumn Quarter 2014

October 7, 2014
The Ethics of Global Palliative Care
Kathy Foley, MD, Memorial Sloan Kettering

October 15, 2014
The Definition of Death: Newly Emerging Controversies
Robert Veatch, PhD, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University

October 22, 2014
Starting Very Small: Newborn Perspectives on the Big Decisions
Peri Klass, MD, Carter Journalism Institute, New York University

October 23, 2014
Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End
Atul Gawande, MD, Brigham and Women’s Hospital

October 29, 2014
Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff
Daniel Sulmasy, MD, PhD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

November 5, 2014
The Lack of Consensus about Futility
Alan Meisel, JD, Center for Bioethics and Health Law, University of Pittsburgh

Friday and Saturday, November 14-15, 2014
26th Annual MacLean Fellows Conference on Clinical Medical Ethics
The MacLean Center Prize will be awarded on Saturday morning to Susan Tolle. To register for the conference and to view the schedule, please visit MacLeanConference2014.eventbrite.com

November 12, 2014
Transferring How We Care for Those Near the End of Life
Susan Tolle, MD, Center for Ethics in Health Care, Oregon Health & Science University

November 19, 2014
Communicating about Prognosis and End-of-Life Care in Patients with Advanced Cancer
Jennifer Temel, MD, Harvard Medical School

November 25, 2014 THANKSGIVING

December 3, 2014
The Five Horsemen: Managing ‘Wicked’ Global Crises
Daniel Callahan, PhD, The Hastings Center
*This lecture will be a videoconference held in P-117*

December 10, 2014
Sedation, Consciousness and Personhood: Clinical and Ethical Perspectives in a Palliative Setting
Timothy Quill, MD, University of Rochester

Winter Quarter 2015

January 7, 2015
Donation after Cardiac Death (DCD): Academic Dissent Fails Patients
Tracy Koogler, MD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

January 14, 2015
The Cost of End-of-Life Care
Tomas Philipson, PhD, Harris School of Public Policy, The University of Chicago

January 21, 2015
Medical Student Reflections on Caring for Dying Patients
Mark Kuczewski, PhD, Neiswanger Institute For Bioethics and Health Policy, Loyola University

January 28, 2015
When Good Intentions Aren’t Enough: Barriers to Optimal End-of-Life Care
Ranjana Srivastava, MD, Monash University, Australia

February 4, 2015
End-of-Life Decisions in Pediatrics: Why They Are Different
Joel Frader, MD, Northwestern University

February 11, 2015
Predicting End of Life
Bill Meadow, MD, PhD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

February 18, 2015
Democratic Legitimacy and End-of-Life Decisions
Dan Bradney, PhD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago
*This lecture will be held in H-103*

March 4, 2015
Ethical Obligations and Clinical Care in End-of-Life Care: Deriving a Quality-of-Life Construct Based on the Islamic Concept of Accountability Before God
Aasim Padela, MD, MSc, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

February 25, 2015
The Promise of a Treatment: Cardiac Arrest and Its Effect on Contemporary Medicine
Daniel Brauner, MD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

March 11, 2015
Tort Liability in End-of-Life Care
Nadia Sawicki, JD, School of Law, Loyola University Chicago

Spring Quarter 2015

January 8, 2015
Ethical Issues in Discontinuing LVADs
Savitri Fedson, MD, The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, The University of Chicago

April 8, 2015
Improving Quality Reduces Costs: Ethical Aspects of Care for the Seriously Ill
Diane Meier, MD, Center to Advance Palliative Care, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

April 15, 2015
Persons with Dementia: Are They the Canary in the Coal Mine?
Joan Teno, MD, Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research, Brown University

April 22, 2015
What’s So Hard about End-of-Life Decision-Making?
Peter Ubel, MD, Duke University

April 29, 2015
A Generation Later: Why Has the End-of-Life Debate Ended?
Richard Epstein, LLB, New York University & The University of Chicago

May 6, 2015
ECMO as a ‘Bridge to Nowhere’: Ethically Challenging and Poignant Cases from the Technological Edge
Ken Prager, MD, Columbia University Center for Bioethics

May 13, 2015
Last Exit Off the Cardiac Freeway: Ethical Considerations in Palliative Care and Cardiovascular Implantable Electronic Devices
James Kirkpatrick, MD, Loyola University

May 20, 2015
One Explorer’s Map into the World of Palliative Care Chaplaincy Research
Linda Emanuel, MD, PhD, Buehler Center on Aging, Health & Society, Northwestern University

This schedule is subject to change. For the most updated schedule, please visit MacLeanCenter.eventbrite.com.