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 institutes for their assistance in co-sponsoring selected lectures in the series:

For more information and for special assistance, please contact Christian Lowe at (773) 834-0663 or email Christian at clowe1@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 @Macleanseminar or @MacLeanEthics.

Accreditation and Credit

The University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

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Upon request, nurses and other health professionals may receive a transcript confirming attendance at this CME certified activity. Please contact the University of Chicago Center for Continuing Medical Education at 773/702-1056 or cme@bsd.uchicago.edu.

The 33rd Annual Interdisciplinary Faculty Seminar Series 2014-2015

Ethical Issues in End-of-Life Care

Wednesdays, October 8 through May 20
Noon - 1:30 PM
P-117, Billings Auditorium
5812 S Ellis Ave, Chicago, IL 60637

These lectures are free of charge and open to the public. Please register for lectures at:

MacLeanCenter.eventbrite.com

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