Values and Ethical Issues in Global Health

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Nothing to Disclosure

Learning Objectives
• By the end of this session, participants should be able to:
  1. List ethical issues commonly seen in global health activities
  2. Describe the conflicts seen in common international ethical issues, and justify an ethical course of action
  3. Analyze examples of how some cultural characteristics can modify the application of accepted ethical principles
Quito, Ecuador

You are volunteering in the OPD of a small hospital in Ecuador. A very ill 60 year old woman is seen with an infected gallbladder and accompanying pneumonia. As you prepare her for admission to hospital and surgery, the accompanying large family prepares to pay the $45 copay. She refuses to be admitted and demands to be taken home “to die”, saying “That is the money for the children’s uniforms and school – I will not take that from them”. Reluctantly, the family takes her home.

Discussion

• What are you feeling during this scenario?
• How might you deal with this situation?

Common Western Values

• Respect for Human Life
  - Dignity and worth of each individual
  - Universal human rights and responsibilities
  - Equal rights to reasonable income, education, health care
  - Importance of personal health and functionality
  - Freedom and Autonomy
    - Ability to pursue personal choices
    - A sense of empowerment and control over self

Common Western Values

- Social justice and equity
- Solidarity
  - Benefiting from and contributing to a community
- Humility
  - Aware of your own faults and failings and therefore reluctant to judge others
- Honesty and Transparency


Values and Ethics

- Ethical principles are formed by personal, social, and corporate/cultural values
- Realities of life may generate conflict with accepted values and ethical principles
- Values and ethical principles may vary according to social/cultural context


Accepted Bio-Ethical Principles in the Western World

- Autonomy
  - personal rule of self
- Beneficence
  - benefits > cost
- Non-Maleficence
  - primum non nocere
- Justice and Equity
  - to each his/her due
  - Equal shares for equal needs
- Confidentiality
  - What is NOT to be divulged abroad
- Truth-Telling
  - Full disclosure
Are there "universal" ethical principles that transcend cultural values?

Context of Global Health Care (short-term)

- Common elements of context:
  - Pervasive poverty
  - Focus on differences in cultures and resources
  - Communal society (community > individual)
  - Inadequate communication
  - Training and skill disparities between local health workers and visitors

Scenario #1

Dr. Bill is a young FP with a small group of internists, pediatricians and nurses providing ambulatory care to a small village in rural Haiti over one week. One of the morning patients is a 46 year old woman with a 2 day old angulated mid-forearm fracture, with some decrease in the radial pulse and distal finger sensation. Dr. Bill has had very little orthopedic experience in his training, but is very concerned that a rapid reduction of the fracture is needed. The nearest adequate facility that could care for this is a day's walk away. The patient insists that she cannot pay the fee and begs Dr. Bill to "fix this".
Should Dr. Bill attempt a reduction?

1. Yes – he should attempt the reduction because she may develop gangrene and/or neurologic injury if he does not, and he is the best qualified in the immediate area.
2. No – he should NOT attempt the reduction, but send her to a local traditional “bone setter”.
3. No – he should NOT attempt the reduction, but should give her the money needed and provide transportation to a medical facility that can appropriately deal with this

Which of the following principles best addresses the ethical dilemma in which Dr. Bill found himself?

1. Autonomy
2. Beneficence
3. Non-Maleficence
4. Justice and Equity
5. Confidentiality
6. Truth-Telling

Common Ethical Issues in Global Health Care

1. Practicing beyond one’s scope and training
2. Provision of perceived inappropriate care because of lack of resources
3. Favoritism in provision of health care because of social position or economic status
4. Obtaining truly informed consent for research, procedures, and illness management strategies
Common Ethical Issues in Global Health Care

5. Ensuring appropriate patient education
6. Power and decision-making disparities between visiting and local physicians
7. How much information to disclose to seriously ill patients
8. Confidentiality in a communal society

Common Ethical Issues in Global Health Care

9. Negative perception of local health workers because of visiting Western physicians
10. Health services and/or medications provided by or paid for by visiting health team

Which global ethical issues you would like to discuss?

1. Practicing beyond one’s scope and training
2. Provision of perceived inappropriate care
3. Favoritism in provision of health care
4. Obtaining truly informed consent
5. Ensuring appropriate patient education
6. Power and decision-making disparities
7. How much information to disclose to ill patients
8. Confidentiality in a communal society
9. Negative perception of local health workers
10. Payment for health services and/or medications
Dr. Wilson was attending on the family medicine service of a program in Quito, Ecuador with a senior FP resident. One of the patients was a 52-year-old male with metastatic pancreatic cancer, now unresponsive to chemotherapy or radiation, who was responsive but in significant pain. In discussing the end-of-life counseling that the resident had provided, the resident indicated that the family had strongly insisted that the patient not be told of his terminal status. All medical personnel and visitors were instructed to act as if he was "slowly improving." He also indicated that this was the case in most of his terminal patients.

Which of the ethical principles most influences your thinking in this case?

1. Autonomy
2. Beneficence
3. Non-Maleficence
4. Justice and Equity
5. Confidentiality
6. Truth-Telling

Discussion - Scenario #2

Questions:
* What cultural issues may be influencing this scenario?
* How might Dr. Wilson deal with this in an ethical and yet culturally-sensitive manner?
Ethics and Culture – Scenario #3
You are seeing ambulatory patients with two young Rwandan doctors in a small district hospital, and a large group crowds into the exam room with an adolescent girl in their midst. They are concerned because after starting oral contraceptives 2 months ago (without consulting anyone else) she is now bleeding constantly, dizzy, and pale. Only a few of the surrounding group appear to be relatives; the remainder are neighbors or friends. There is a barrage of questions with concerns over her unmarried status and about her prognosis.

Which of the ethical principles most influences your thinking in this case?

1. Autonomy
2. Beneficence
3. Non-Maleficence
4. Justice and Equity
5. Confidentiality
6. Truth-Telling

Discussion - Scenario #3
Questions:
* What cultural issues may be influencing this scenario?
* How might this be dealt with in an ethical and yet culturally-sensitive manner?
Ethics and Culture – Scenario #4

Dr. Gina is working in an Indian Health Service hospital on the Navajo Reservation, and is evaluating a 27 year old Navajo male with abdominal pain for 3 days. The history and physical examination is consistent with an acute appendicitis, which is supported by laboratory studies. She begins to discuss emergency surgery with the patient, his wife, and parents, but they all insist that he undergo a Navajo sing first; which will take at least 3 days. In spite of her strongest arguments, they proceed to take him off the exam table and put him in the truck to go for the sing.

Which of the ethical principles most influences your thinking in this case?

1. Autonomy
2. Beneficence
3. Non-Maleficence
4. Justice and Equity
5. Confidentiality
6. Truth-Telling

Discussion - Scenario #4

Questions:
* What cultural issues may be influencing this scenario?
* How might this be dealt with in an ethical and yet culturally-sensitive manner?
Summary

- Ethical issues are extremely common in global health activities, and must be considered
- Many ethical issues arise out of conflicts between our culturally-mediated values and those of another culture
- Accepted ethical principles can provide a framework for consideration of perceived ethical conflicts.
- Specific cultural values may require some modification in the application of accepted medical ethical principles

What can we do?

- Consistent contextualized application of ethical principles to global medical practice, international research, and medical care in the context of scarcity
- Improved attention to ethical issues within the context of a patient’s cultural background and identity in your daily attention to patients
- Provide global health care only in the context of an enduring partnership with the national or local health care system

References for Further Consideration

- Islamic code of medical and health ethics
  WHO - EMRC 517, Sept. 2005
- Creating a Framework for Medical Professionalism: An Initial Consensus Statement From an Arab Nation
QUESTIONS??
COMMENTS??

Thank You!

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