

**make
history.**



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Medical Ethics Teaching: What we are (mostly) missing

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Outline

- 1. The aim of medical ethics teaching to professionals**
- 2. Types of ethical challenges**
 - A. Determining an ethically defensible course of action
 - B. Living up to ethical demands
 - C. Living in the world while being ethical
- 3. Traditional Medical Ethics teaching focuses on A**
- 4. Are philosophers/ethicists the right people for this?**
- 5. Some resources from philosophy**

The Aim of Medical Ethics

Teaching to Future Professionals

**Act of co-creation (between institution and individual)
where you are both aiming to produce a “good” medical
professional – where “good” here means someone who
practices both well and also ethically.**



Types of ethical challenges

A. What should I do?

B. How should I do what I should do?

C. How should I live with what happens?



A. What should I do?

This is the first and most obvious ethical challenge – knowing what we should do in a situation. And this is what ethicists typically spend most of our time on teaching (might just be me – but if you look at papers on medical ethics teaching, consensus documents etc – they spend most of their time on this as well).

B. How should I do what I should do?

Ethical decisions sometimes have costs – financial, social, political and personal.

Example – Drunk colleague – nurse

We are sensitive to the interplay of power and it is easy to prefer self preservation or the preservation of relationships over behaving ethically.

C. How should I live with what happens?

Sometimes – either we do wrong things, or outcomes that we don't want happen.

This creates moral distress.



Focusing on A is problematic

1. It makes ethical decision making look harder than it is.

It is often straightforward and covered by existing guidelines – ie informed consent

Annette Braunack-Mayer – Yesterday – “With most research ethics applications there is little need for deliberation”.

2. It uses all our curriculum time on a third of the job.



Why do we focus on A?

1. Philosophers are notoriously bad at answering questions – in part because our epistemic commitments make us wary of easy answers.
2. Complex cases are “interesting” – and what the literature focuses on.
3. Teaching philosophy often has an implicit value neutrality that makes it hard to teach other things.
4. It might simply be what many of us are comfortable with/feel we have some expertise in.

Does philosophy/ethics have resources for teaching B & C?

Open to the idea that the answer here is no. Or at least that it requires others as well (medical professionals, Sims experts etc)

But I want to point briefly to some resources within philosophy for these challenges.

Resources

1. Virtue Ethics & Stoicism
2. Chinese philosophy concept of “De”
3. Detached Compassion (Buddhism)
4. Role based Karma (Hinduism)
5. Moral leadership
6. Professionalism
7. Moral distress