For complex ethical issues in medicine, ethics committees and consultations offer a solutions-oriented approach that is essential to modern health care. Learn about the historical development of these groups, their current roles in the medical community and how educators can prepare future physicians for ethical challenges they will face in practice.

The May issue of the AMA Journal of Ethics® explores the roles of ethics committees in the modern health care system. Articles featured in this issue include:

- “Consequences for patients and their loved ones when physicians refuse to participate in ethics consultation processes.” When a physician is unwilling to participate in the ethics deliberation process, how is the function and role of an ethics committee affected? Learn about the structural roles in ethics committees and the best approach to navigating these complicated situations.

- “Roles of student ethics committees in preparing future physicians.” Medical students can experience ethical dilemmas and concerns about professional behavior during their training. Explore the roles of medical educators in preparing future physicians with the skills and knowledge to identify and respond to these challenges.

- “Why did hospital ethics committees emerge in the U.S.?” Ethics committees are the primary mechanism for dealing with ethical issues in hospitals today. But how did they come to be present in nearly all U.S. hospitals in just a few decades? Learn about the historical emergence of ethics committees and some of the landmark events that contributed to their integration into health care.
“International access to clinical ethics consultation via telemedicine.” Clinical ethics consultation is a service provided to enhance patient care by identifying, analyzing and resolving ethics dilemmas in clinical settings, but this service is often not available everywhere. Find out how telemedicine helps international and remote accessibility.

In the journal’s May podcast, Joseph J. Fins, MD, professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College, discusses the work of ethics committees and consultants as they pursue professionalization and respond to changes in health care organization and practice.

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