

What clinical ethics can learn from decision science

OCT 18, 2019

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While there is disciplinary diversity in bioethics, it is limited. Other disciplines that could improve the quality of bioethics in its clinical and research manifestations have not been included. One of those fields is decision science, which is designed to help people make optimal choices given the information available.

However, there are some ethical questions about decision science, including the development of methods for learning how people make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. It is also important to consider legal, social and cultural dimensions of applying decision science to actual decision-making in ethically complex cases in health care settings.

The October issue of the *AMA Journal of Ethics*® (@JournalofEthics) features numerous perspectives and insights on the value of decision science for clinical ethics.

Articles include:

“What Clinical Ethics Can Learn From Decision Science.” How information is provided can change a choice. Decision science helps reveal affective forecasting errors and can generate choices congruent with patients’ and families’ values.

“How Should Clinical Ethics Consultants Support Parents’ Decision Making?” Rather than relying on decision aids, values-based approaches to decision making illuminate a plurality of possible right actions.

“How Should Decision Aids Be Used During Counseling to Help Patients Who Are ‘Genetically at Risk’?” Prognostic uncertainty about risk creates demand for ongoing communication and facilitated reflection about goals and values.

“How Should Decision Science Inform Scarce Blood Product Allocation?” Decision aids could help clinicians know when to request ethics consultation or re-evaluate blood product usage in a specific patient care situation.

Listen and learn

In the journal's October podcast, University of Michigan bioethicist Brian Zikmund-Fisher, PhD, shares his own experience as a patient and explains how decision science can help navigate ethically complex health decisions. Listen to previous episodes of the podcast, "Ethics Talk," or subscribe in iTunes or other services.

Submit manuscripts and artwork

The journal's editorial focus is on commentaries and articles that offer practical advice and insights for medical students and physicians. Submit a manuscript for publication. The journal also invites original photographs, graphics, cartoons, drawings and paintings that explore the ethical dimensions of health or health care.

The AMA Journal of Ethics John Conley Art of Medicine Contest for U.S.-based medical students, residents, and fellows is now open.

A look ahead

Upcoming issues of the *AMA Journal of Ethics* will focus on the ethics of assessing quality of life in reconstructive transplantation and governing human-genome editing. Sign up to receive email alerts when new issues are published.