Homeless health care, ending homelessness are matters of justice

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Staff News Writer

Homelessness is a nationwide ethical issue. Children, seniors and everyone else chronically without shelter experience cumulative health detriments from exposure, violence, poor nutrition and limited access to hygiene opportunities and health services. In addition, homelessness is harmful to the health care system and health workers.

The November issue of AMA Journal of Ethics® (@JournalofEthics) explores the ethical implications of the struggle to deliver high-quality homeless health care while working to end homelessness. It also considers health professionals’ and organizations’ roles and obligations to deliver equitable care and promote justice.

Articles include:

"How Should Autonomy of Persons Experiencing Homelessness Be Balanced With Public Health During a Pandemic?"

COVID-19 underscores historical precedent for fear-driven responses that disregard autonomy among people with low incomes who are also people of color.

"Bringing Health Professions Education to Patients on the Streets"


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Health educators have duties to teach patient focus, motivate equity and cultivate students’ capacity to serve our most vulnerable neighbors, wherever they reside.

"How Medicaid and States Could Better Meet Health Needs of Persons Experiencing Homelessness"

Access to shelter can improve health outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness and reduce overall health costs.

"How Should Street Medicine Clinicians Interact With Law Enforcement Officers?"

Clinicians and police are positioned to help persons experiencing homelessness, but little has been said about how their best impulses to serve could most productively overlap.

Listen and learn

In the journal's November "Ethics Talk" podcast, Sheryl Fleisch, MD—associate professor and chief of health equity in the psychiatry department at the University of Florida and chief of psychiatric services at University of Florida Health Shands Hospital—discusses strategies for delivering health services to people experiencing homelessness, including street psychiatry.

The November issue also features five author-interview podcasts. Listen to previous episodes of the “Ethics Talk” podcast or subscribe in iTunes or other services.

Earn CME
These AMA Journal of Ethics CME modules are each designated by the AMA for a maximum of 1 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™:

- How Should Autonomy of Persons Experiencing Homelessness Be Balanced With Public Health During a Pandemic?
- How Should Clinicians Help Homeless Trauma Survivors Make Irreversible Surgical Care Decisions?
- Training Clinicians to Care for Patients Where They Are.
- Bringing Health Professions Education to Patients on the Streets.
- Four Ways to Limit Use of Force in Care of Persons Experiencing Homelessness.
- How Should Street Medicine Clinicians Interact With Law Enforcement Officers?
- How Bodily Integrity Is a Core Ethical Value in Care of Persons Experiencing Homelessness.

Additionally, the CME module “Ethics Talk: Street Psychiatry for People Experiencing Homelessness” is designated by the AMA for a maximum of 0.25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™.

The offerings are part of the AMA Ed Hub™, an online learning platform that brings together high-quality CME, maintenance of certification, and educational content from trusted sources, all in one place—with activities relevant to you, automated credit tracking and reporting for some states and specialty boards.

Learn more about AMA CME accreditation.

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.

A look ahead

Upcoming issues of the AMA Journal of Ethics will focus on health justice and diversity, disparities along the medical-dental divide and tactical health and law enforcement. Sign up to receive email alerts when new issues are published.


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