

Syllabus
Modern Medicine

Lifelong Learning Collaborative
Wednesday mornings 10-12

Spring 2022
March 16 to May 4

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Week 1 March 16

MEDICINE & FAMILY DYNAMICS

Issues to consider

How does genetic information affect individuals and families who find new relatives and disease susceptibilities through home test kits? How diverse are the attitudes of family members to want to know/not know of their genetic risks and their relationships with others? What happened to the promise of anonymity that was once offered to sperm donors? What are the repercussions when relatives ask one another to be tested for genes associated with specific diseases? Should a society be allowed to force pregnant women to undergo genetic testing of the fetus for serious diseases that will require lifelong care that will be paid for at public expense? How slippery might the slippery slope become toward the crafting of public policies regarding mandatory testing? Who should be privy to information about the genes of others? What's the balance of harms-to-benefits of genetic testing?

Source materials

- New York Times Magazine: June 26, 2019: A Family Portrait: Brothers, Sisters, Strangers
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/06/26/magazine/sperm-donor-siblings.html>
- Stories We Tell (documentary film by Sarah Polley, available free on Kanopy)
- Kolata: Their DNA Holds a Warning, But They Don't Want to Know
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/21/health/dna-biobanks-mutations.html>
- Can I Contact the Grandkids I Discovered on a DNA Website?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/magazine/can-i-contact-the-grandkids-i-discovered-on-a-dna-website.html>

- Article Knoppers (pdf)

Presenters **Ruth and Frank**

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Week 2 *March 23* **MEDICINE & CRIME**

Issues to consider

What ethical conundrums do medical professionals face when they assist in interrogations (Guantanamo), monitor prisoners for health problems during solitary confinement, and participate in carrying out capital punishment (injecting lethal drugs; declaring death after executions by firing squads, gas chambers, or electrocution)? What ethical contradictions arise when mentally ill, accused individuals are forced to take anti-psychotic medicines in order to be made sane enough to stand trial and then, possibly, be executed? How does the medical dictum “first, do no harm” figure into and clash with these actions by medical professionals? What roles are new genetic technologies playing in trials and convictions and exonerations of accused persons? How much better is DNA evidence than more standard forms of testimony (eye witness accounts, physical damage at the scene of a crime, others)? What inequities is DNA evidence exposing in the criminal justice system of the United States?

Source materials

- <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/medicating-death-row-inmates-so-they-qualify-execution/2004-09>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cWL6HqjFMY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bD3KyHAr7Y0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcGRG7F54O4>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/shooting/stories/weston042399.htm>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/01/23/a-living-hell-or-a-life-saved/b92dec56-08ab-43e1-9fd0-83b540c9c9b8/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrwCJhIrmE>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Jp-mbGRxhM>

- <https://innocenceproject.org/all-cases/#>

Presenters **(1) David** **(2) Frank, Ruth**

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Week 3 *March 30*

MEDICINE & CELEBRITIES

Issues to consider

What happens when a celebrity becomes an outspoken advocate for a particular disease? Should celebrities and other entitled patients be able to jump the queue for established or experimental treatments? Who has the authority/responsibility to say “no” or stop entitled patients from demanding unreasonable interventions when medical options no longer exist for their illnesses? What problems do entitled/celebrity patients and their entitled/celebrity doctors create in hospitals for staff and for other patients? Are boutique/concierge medical practices morally defensible? Should doctors in these practices be allowed to send their patients to hospitals that are supported by public funds? How do celebrity doctors uniquely game medical practice; have some of these doctors become careless and/or incompetent as a result of being in the spotlight? What changes might open the way for celebrity patients and doctors to actually contribute to the common good?

Source materials

- <https://bwhclinicalandresearchnews.org/2016/05/08/vip-syndrome-the-pitfalls-of-special-treatment/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9y2qsGyAhk> (1 hour on Dr. Feelgood)
- <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/when-the-patient-is-a-vip/>
- <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/ethical-concierge-medicine/2013-07>
- Article: Lerner (pdf)

Presenters **(1) Michael** **(2)**

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Week 4 *April 6*

MEDICINE & WOMEN

Issues to consider

Are women doctors and women patients treated fairly by the medical profession? What glass ceilings still exist in hospitals, medical schools, and other medical establishments that block women physicians from holding top jobs? How much gaslighting of women patients and women physicians still exists? What factors cause women to leave medicine? Do clinical trials of new drugs and new treatments include women appropriately? Is funding for diseases that are unique to women in line with the prevalence of these diseases in the population? What impacts on women's health have been seen as a result of basing women's healthcare so strongly around reproduction? How are common health problems that women face throughout life—heart disease, diabetes, obesity, neurologic diseases—affected by this approach? What federal legislation, in addition to *Roe v Wade*, made substantive positive changes in women's health and medical autonomy? What recent laws are undermining those progressive steps? How does empathy figure into what it means to be a good doctor?

Source materials

Women as doctors. Women as patients.

- Article Sulmasy (pdf)
- Article Fetters (pdf)
- Article Fraser (pdf)
- Article Weiss (pdf)
- Timeline (jpeg)

Presenters **(1) Jan** **(2) Jessie**

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Week 5 *April 13*

MEDICINE & TRUTH TELLING

Issues to consider

Why do patients lie to their doctors, and why do doctors lie to their patients? What do they each lie about? How do doctors gauge which of their patients want “the whole truth” and which ones can't or don't want to hear their diagnoses and prognoses? Why are the media and the public so

eager to label health authorities as liars when new medical advisories are issued, instead of acknowledging that research and the passage of time simply provide more informed insights about a disease's course and treatments that do/do not work? How might the 2021 CURES Act, which mandates that patients have full access to their complete electronic medical records, affect the delivery of truth to patients? Who should be given access to a person's medical data? Should individuals be allowed to limit which medical professionals are allowed to see their medical data? What added value do in-person meetings with knowledgeable guides give to patients trying to understand their medical information? How open to hearing the truth are patients and their family members when therapeutic options have ended and death approaches? How does hearing the truth affect the unspoken covenants and contracts in the doctor-patient relationship and the patient's feelings of trust, betrayal, anger, sadness, guilt, confusion, satisfaction?

Source materials

- Article: Lamas (pdf)
- Article: Howley (pdf)
- Article: Rieff (pdf)
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/08/14/340351393/when-patients-read-what-their-doctors-write>
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/08/23/640929647/open-medical-records-can-spur-frank-talk-between-doctors-and-patients>
- <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-misinformation-advisory.pdf>

Presenters **(1) Ellen** **(2) Doree**

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Week 6 April 20

MEDICINE & PEOPLE OF COLOR

Issues to consider

What can be done to overturn the long-standing legacy of mistrust of the health establishment in the Black, Hispanic, and Asian communities? What

are “race corrections” that have long been in use in medicine? What egregious examples of such race norming and of institutional racism still exist in hospitals and in clinical practices? What factors have contributed to the reluctance of people of color to be vaccinated and to participate in clinical trials? Why are human genetic variations not relevant to social definitions of race? What are the key cultural determinants of health disparities between People of Color and people in the White community? What changes in health care have come about as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement? Is it relevant for medical staff to begin grand rounds presentations with information on the skin color of the patient? Why is maternal mortality still so high in the Black community in the United States?

Source materials

- <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/12/419426/race-norming-blamed-denying-payouts-ex-nfl-players-dementia>
- <https://www.statnews.com/2020/06/17/racial-bias-skews-algorithms-widely-used-to-guide-patient-care/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>
- Ted talk: <https://bioethicstoday.org/blog/we-asked-for-racial-equity-and-they-gave-us-pig-hearts/>
- talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/monique_rainford_america_s_maternal_nightmare (13 minutes)
- <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/20/opinions/protect-mother-pregnancy-williams-opinion/index.html>

Presenters **(1) Phil** **(2) David**

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Week 7 April 27

MEDICINE & THE FUTURE

Issues to consider

What is an appropriate balance between developing expensive, futuristic, medical projects for single individuals versus providing vaccines or medicines to large, needy populations? Who gets to decide which paths new medical technologies should pursue? How does the concept of

distributive justice play out in these calculations? What are the objections of animal rights activists to xenotransplantation (transplants from one species to another)? What risks do xenotransplants pose to human recipients? What is objectionable about the recent choice of a convicted felon to be the recipient in a pioneering pig-heart transplant? What are the rights and obligations of organ donors and recipients? What has motivated individuals to produce “savior siblings” and what ethical objections have people raised? What are human enhancements and the transhuman movement all about? Should medicine have limits?

Source materials

- Article Galchen (pdf)
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-59951264>
- <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/12/21/savior-siblings%C2%A0or-backup-children-15229>
- <https://www.nature.com/scitable/forums/genetics-generation/case-study-in-savior-siblings-104229158/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2016/07/26/human-enhancement-the-scientific-and-ethical-dimensions-of-striving-for-perfection/>
- Dr. Strange (Marvel films ... if you want to see Hollywood’s take on the future of humans)

Presenters **(1) Kay** **(2) Stephen**

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Week 8 *May 4*

MEDICINE & SPIRITUALITY/RELIGION

Issues to consider

Is there space in modern medicine for considering the sacred? Why are so many doctors reluctant to factor in patients’ spiritual practices as they devise treatment plans for their patients? How is attention to a patient’s spirituality of value in promoting healing or in helping patients cope with illness? Does spirituality have a biological or genetic component? What kinds of evidence do neuro-theologists and other scientists bring to this discussion; what evidence do theologians bring? Why is health advocacy from the pulpit so effective? What religious beliefs motivate patients to

endure and prolong their own suffering or that of their family members, including their children? What roles have religious factors played in legislation calling for medical aid in dying? Should time limits be placed on families/patients waiting for a miracle when all medical options have ended? Is medicine itself sacred? Where do spirituality and medicine clash?

Source materials

Spirituality/religion, miracles & medicine

- Article: Yasgur (pdf)
- Article: Goldman (pdf)
- Article: VanderWeele (pdf)
- Article: Green (pdf)
- Article: Shermer (pdf)

Presenters **(1) Susan (2) Marilyn**