Professionalism and ethics in a changing world

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What is ethics?

• Bargain with society
• Influenced by key actors
  – Philosophers
  – Public
  – Politicians/Parliamentarians
  – Press
  – Priests
  – Profession(s)
  – ?more

• Influenced by social norms
• Not set in stone
History

- Prayer of Maimonides
- Hippocratic Oath
- Declaration of Geneva and
- International Code of Medical Ethics

- Four principles
- Rights based
- Utilitarianism
- Kant etc
Four principles revised

Autonomy
Beneficence
Confidentiality
Do No Harm
Equity
(After Bernard Lo)

(Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence, Justice)
Past challenges

• Abortion
• Confidentiality
• Consent
• Discontinuation of treatment
• Brain stem death
• Experimentation/research
Changes to medicine...

- Doctors off their pedestals
- Challenges to concepts of expertise
  - Information from www
  - Health literacy
  - Understanding of rights
- Shared decision making
- Patient or person centered care
- Inter-professional collaboration
Current challenges

• Assisted reproduction
• Resource usage
• Prioritisation
• Communication
• End of life decisions/treatment discontinuation
• Incompetent adult patients
• Role of family in decision making
• Cross border care/reporting
Other challenges

• Multiculturalism
• Movement of persons around the world
• Different social/cultural constraints
• Belief systems
• Law/legal cases

• Changing concepts of complex issues such as
  – Benefits
  – Futility
  – Freedom
  – Rights
Analysing cases

• Autonomy seen as paramount in Europe, Americas, Australasia etc
• Is there a paramount value elsewhere?
• Difficulty in deciding what is a benefit and what is a harm
• Where do different balances lie?
• Balance between individual and collective “rights”
Assessing benefits

- Complex
- Specific
- Patient centred
- Varies with time
- Depends upon morbidity
- Views of doctor/patient/family
- Do lawyers/judges agree with doctors?

- Assessing futility is much the same
Professionalism and ethics

- Nebulous concept
- Overlaps
- Ethics as a marker of professionalism
- Tensions between duties (e.g., society/patient)
- Embracing societal values
What is Professionalism

- Whistle blowing
- Truth telling
- Duty to society
- Empathy, compassion and caring
- Life long learning
- Commitment – to what? to whom?
Human Rights

• Values based
• Principles
• Some non-derogable rights
  – Right to not be tortured
  – Duty of doctor to care for those in medical need
  – Responsibility of organised medicine to protect both
• Arguments over right to health
Certainty…

There is none

Except (perhaps)

There is always an ethical element to medical decisions. Professionalism requires that we consider them.
Thank You

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