INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL ETHICS

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ETHICS ARE ...

- Moral Principles
- What is good and bad
- What is right and wrong
- Based on value system
- Ethical norms are not universal – depends on the sub culture of the society
DEFINITION

-Standards of behavior that tell us how human beings ought to act in the many situations in which they find themselves
HISTORICALLY

• Medical ethics may be traced to guidelines on the duty of physicians such as the Hippocratic oath
A physician must recognize responsibility to patients first and foremost, as well as to society, to other health professionals, and to self.

These are not laws, but standards of conduct which define the essentials of honorable behavior for the physician.
3 criteria for judging ethical dilemmas:

1. Obligations – rights, rules, oaths.
2. Ideals – goals, concept of excellence, fairness, loyalty, forgiveness, peace.
3. Consequences – may be beneficial or harmful effects that result from the action and the people involved. Can be physical, emotional, obvious, or hidden.
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS

- Saving of life and promotion of health above all else.
- Make every effort to keep the patient as comfortable as possible and preserve life when possible.
- Respect the patient’s choices when all options have been discussed.
- Treat all patients equally.
FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS

• Autonomy
• Beneficence
• Non-maleficence
• Medical Malpractice
• Justice
AUTONOMY

• Patient has freedom of thought, intention and action when making decisions regarding health care procedures

• For a patient to make a fully informed decision, she/he must understand all risks and benefits of the procedure and the likelihood of success.
In the case of a child, the principle of avoiding the harm of death, and the principle of providing a medical benefit that can restore the child to health and life, would be given precedence over the autonomy of the child's parents as surrogate decision makers.
BENEFICENCE

• The practitioner should act in “the best interest” of the patient - the procedure be provided with the intent of doing good to the patient
“Above all, do no harm,” – Make sure that the procedure does not harm the patient or others in society
• When interventions undertaken by physicians create a positive outcome while also potentially doing harm it is known as the "double effect."

EX: The use of morphine in the dying patient eases pain and suffering, while hastening the demise through suppression of the respiratory drive.
• Physicians are obligated not prescribe medications they know to be harmful.
• Some interpret this value to exclude the practice of euthanasia
• Violation of non-maleficence is the subject of medical malpractice litigation
MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

• An act or omission by a health care provider that deviates from accepted standards of practice in the medical community which causes injury to the patient.
JUSTICE

• The distribution of scarce health resources, and the decision of who gets what treatment “fairness and equality”
• The burdens and benefits of new or experimental treatments must be distributed equally among all groups in society