Chapter 66
Ethical Guidelines for the Quality Assessment of Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

One of the keystone concepts of healthcare improvement is the belief that informed choices will lead to enhanced quality of life and healthcare. Medical Ethics, or Bioethics, is the study of moral issues in the fields of medical treatment and research. It is also used to describe ethical issues in the life sciences and the distribution of scarce medical resources. This chapter will review and describe the principles of ethics and discuss how ethical principles can be used as guidelines for the quality assessment of healthcare provision. It will also discuss areas such as: ethical handling of information, patient safety, communication, obligation for impartial quality assessment, private health information protection, ethical committees and supervision authorities, competence of the assessor, supervision of ethical guidelines for health quality assessment, research and publication ethics, and global ethics of healthcare. Another goal of the manuscript will be to serve as a central reference to access of information about resources related to this topic.

INTRODUCTION

As a branch of Philosophy, Ethics guides the leading of a good life. Ethics also guides moral conduct in life. Applied Ethics, on the other hand, is a discipline that guides application of ethical theory to real-life situations. Medical Ethics or Bioethics, studies the role of value judgments and "moral issues in the fields of medical treatment and research. The term is also sometimes used more generally to describe ethical issues in the life sciences and the distribution of scarce medical resources. The professional fields that deal with ethical issues in medicine include medicine, nursing, law, sociology, philoso-

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phy, and theology, though today medical ethics is also recognized as its own discipline" (McGee & Caplan, 2007). Over time, Bioethics has grown as a discipline and its practitioners play important roles in clinical decision making, research studies, legislature, professional organizations, and community activities; in academia, government, non-governmental organizations and industry. Events that have shaped the development of Bioethics as a discipline over time are outlined in Table 1.

One of the major applications of applied ethics in healthcare is to provide guidelines for assuring quality in healthcare through its assessment. Healthcare quality encompasses a variety of issues, each with ethical implications; therefore ethical assessment issues will as well encompass several issues from a variety of angles. The goal of quality assessment in health care is continuous improvement of the quality of services provided for patients and populations and of the ways and means to produce these services (Chattopadhyay, 2009).

Although several ethical principles have been defined (in addition to the main principles) such as: Trusts in relationships; Veracity; Fidelity; Avoidance of killing; Gratitude; and Reparation, that are very important in healthcare action, decision making, quality assurance and policy making. Rhe four main principles of Bioethics are: Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-maleficence, and Justice. These principles and their applications are outlined in Figure 1.

CHALLENGES TO QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE

Healthcare systems across the world generally do not provide consistent, high quality medical care to all people in respective nation states. Understanding of disease process, various determinants of disease and advancements in available treatments, medical technology, shifts and drifts in disease patterns along

Table 1. Developments in bioethics: A timeline

Year	Development	Resource for Further Reading
1947	The Nuremberg Code	http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/nuremberg.html
1964	The Declaration of Helsinki	http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/helsinki.html
1966	Animal Welfare Act	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/awa.shtml
1974	National Research Act	http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/irb/irb_introduction.htm
1979	The Belmont Report	http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html)
2009 (update)	US Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Public Welfare Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects	http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm
1995	National Bioethics Advisory Commission- Ethical and Policy Issues in International Research: Clinical Trials in Developing Countries	http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/nbac/human/overvol1.html
1997	International Conference on Harmonization: Guidance Documents	http://www.fda.gov/regulatoryinformation/guidances/ucm122049.htm
2002	Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) guidelines	http://www.cioms.ch/publications/layout_guide2002.pdf
2002	Nuffield Council on Bioethics- The Ethics of Research Related to Healthcare in Developing Countries	http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/fileLibrary/pdf/errhdc_fullreport001.pdf
2003	HIV Trials Prevention Network- Ethics Guidance for Research	http://www.hptn.org/web%20documents/EWG/HPTNEthicsGuidanceFINAL15April2003.pdf)