Biomedical Ethics
Fall 2020

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Office hours
I will be available every Wednesday from 10am-11am, but I can also be available other times that suit you. Just email me to make an appointment.

Secretary
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Course Description
We will examine in depth major ethical issues in contemporary medicine and health care.

- In the first half of the course, we will examine ethical issues of how to allocate limited health care resources. We will address the pressing problem of how to ration scarce ventilators, ICU beds, and other emergency care during pandemics such as Covid-19. We will also address the general problem of how to decide what diseases and which patients to give priority to, with special focus on questions about disability and old age (and corresponding worries about ‘ableism’ and ‘ageism’).
- In the second half of the course, we will examine ethical issues of physician-assisted death and other end-of-life decisions. We will address the questions of when it is morally acceptable to withdraw life-sustaining treatment, and whether it is ever morally acceptable for physicians to assist patients in hastening death.

Course aims
- Developing philosophical skills pertaining to moral argument about issues in contemporary practical ethics
- Analyzing ethical positions as advanced in a variety of writings—philosophical essays as well as court cases and articles in medical journals
- Understanding some of the most important ethical positions on health care rationing and allocation
- Understanding some of the most important ethical positions on physician-assisted death and end-of-life decisions

Assessment
There are three parts to your grade: two writing assignments and participation.

- The first writing assignment is due 26 October. It will be 1,500 words and is worth 40% of your grade.
- The second writing assignment is due on 17 December. It will be 2,500 words, and is worth 55% of your grade.
- Participation is worth 5% of your grade. This will be based on your weekly posts and activity in Friday discussion sections.

Course format
Every week you will:

- Do the readings. The required reading for each week will consist of two or three articles or court cases. I will also list additional readings on the week’s topic.
- Watch the lectures and power presentations on the readings.
• Post a 200- to 400-word comment by noon on the day before your tutorial. In the lectures, I will pose questions about the readings, and you are welcome to make your comment a response to one of the questions I pose. But you also may develop your own objection or novel argument about an aspect of the reading you find particularly interesting.
• Read the comments of the other students in your group.
• Participate in the tutorial. You should come to tutorial ready to discuss the readings, the questions posed in lectures, your own comment, and the comments of the other students in your group. Information about the timing and venue of tutorials will be posted on the course LEARN page.

Course Schedule

21-25 September
Required reading
• Cubbon, J., “The principle of QALY maximization as the basis for allocating health care resources,” Journal of Medical Ethics 1991: 181-184.

Additional reading

28 September–2 October
Required reading
• Bognar, G., “Does cost effectiveness analysis unfairly discriminate against people with disabilities?”

Additional reading

5-9 October
Required reading
• Harris, J., “It’s not NICE to discriminate,” Journal of Medical Ethics 2005: 373-375.

Additional reading
  o Harris, J., “NICE rejoinder,” Journal of Medical Ethics 2007: 467
12-16 October
Required reading


Additional reading
- Callahan, D., “Must we ration health care for the elderly?” Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics 2012: 10-17.

19-23 October
Required reading


Additional reading
- There are a number of articles you might find interesting in the special issue of Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal (17 June 2020) on ethics, pandemics, and Covid-19: https://kiej.georgetown.edu/special-issue-covid-19/

October 22 (noon): mid-term essay due

26-30 October
Required reading

- In Re Quinlan: https://law.justia.com/cases/new-jersey/supreme-court/1976/70-n-j-10-0.html
- Bouvia v Superior Court: https://www.courtlister.com/opinion/2125712/bouvia-v-superior-court/

Additional reading

2-6 November
Required reading

- Vacco v. Quill: https://www.courtlister.com/opinion/118145/vacco-v-quill?

**Additional reading**

### 9-13 November

**Required reading**

**Additional reading**

### 16-20 November

**Required reading**

**Additional reading**

### 23-27 November

**Required reading**

**Additional reading**

### 30 November–4 December

**Read:**

Additional reading

10 December (noon): final essay due