Clinical ethics is an interdisciplinary activity to identify, analyze, and resolve ethical problems that arise in the care of particular patients. While a theoretical understanding of ethical issues is essential, the details of actual clinical practice are often more complex and contextual than abstract principles would have one believe. Medical considerations, ethical and legal dimensions, comparisons with similar cases (casuistry), cultural factors, psychological conditions, familial circumstances, “stakeholders,” time constraints, heightened emotions, communication barriers, and a host of other dimensions make clinical ethics a matter of getting to plausibly “good” outcomes.

Readings – required text (can be purchased on Amazon, AbeBooks, or eBooks)
This is “the” classic manual that is commonly used by clinician and the most successful “how to” book in the field.

Otherwise, articles will be emailed to you weekly.

Course Structure
The first several weeks of the course are introductory with regard to the nature and function of ethics committees and clinical ethical consultations, including background and essential documents. The course will then turn to an array of clinical areas and cases, as well as ethical issues that have been raised in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Week 1 (August 27): Introduction
(Phyllis Migdal MD, MA)

In this week we will discuss the historical development of clinical ethics committees, their composition, and their primary roles (policy, advisory case review, education). We will also introduce the function of providing clinical ethics consultation in small teams. How does this practice work? What are its strengths? How often is this service requested and by whom? What is the relationship of the ethics committee to offices of (a) Legal Risk Management and (b) Patient Advocacy?
Readings:


Stony Brook Med “Ethics Consultation”

Who’s Who in the Hospital Setting

American Medical Association Opinion 9.11 Ethics Committees in Health Care Institutions

Jonsen, Siegler & Winslade, Clinical Ethics 8th Edition: A Practical Approach to Ethical Decisions in Clinical Medicine, Introduction and Topic One

(Robyn McKeefrey RN, MA)

We will discuss various procedures and forms developed within the healthcare setting that attempt to address common ethical issues in healthcare with an emphasis on consent forms, surrogacy, and agents designated by proxy. Various pitfalls will be addressed.

Readings:
Stony Brook Medicine Consent to Operation or Procedure and Anesthesia 2017 (McKeefrey)

Informed Consent Forms

Ch. 16 Ethics and the Law


Stony Brook Med - The Patient’s Bill of Rights

Stony Brook Med - Steps in Practical Judgement

The MOLST Form (Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment” (McKeefrey)

The MOLST Form - Frequently Asked Questions (McKeefrey)

What is a MOLST Form?
New York State Health Care Proxy


**Week 3 (September 10): Introduction to Case Analysis and Some Approaches to Ethical Reasoning**
(Phyllis Migdal MD, MA)

We will introduce students to the basics of clinical case write-ups and clinical case analysis. The ethics chart note is intended to serve multiple purposes, and understanding how to properly structure one is essential to both this course and to the usefulness of any future writing in this area you might do. You will also be provided with a template to model your assignments on. We will discuss approaches to ethics case analysis (inductive details, ethical principles involved, casuistical dimensions, the Jonsen rubric, who decides, framing goals, shared decision making and its basis/limits, etc.).

**Readings:**

Ethics Case Consultation Toolkit Summary Template

Exemplary Clinical Ethics Chart Note

Stony Brook Medicine, Moral Values Important in Clinical Decision Making


Week 4 (September 17): Ethical Issues in Clinical Pediatrics
(Kathleen Culver, DNP, RN, CPNP, MA, Rina Meyer, MD)

In this week’s class, we will explore the unique ethical challenges facing pediatric patients and their health care providers. In pediatrics, most decisions are made by surrogate decision-makers, calling into question the concept of “best interest of the child” and requiring us to identify the appropriate decision-makers. We will look at a case that highlights these issues. Additionally, adolescent patients are at the cusp of their ability to make autonomous decisions. We will explore what happens when these decisions differ from the decisions of either their parents or the medical team. Finally, we will look at one of the most vulnerable pediatric populations – developmentally disabled children – and explore the challenges inherent in their care, and the multiple players involved.

Readings:


Cases

Week 5 (September 24): Reproduction
(Robyn McKeefrey RN, MA)

Reproductive ethics assures that the basic rights of all people to decide freely concerning whether or not to reproduce is independent of discrimination, coercion or violence. In making those choices, the framework of human rights and basic medical ethics principles of autonomy, self-determination, justice, liberty, individual freedom and equitable access to services all apply. In this section we will explore within the field of reproductive ethics the topics of preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), the deaf culture, and assisted reproductive technology with applicable case studies sure to result in an interesting paradigm of discussion.

Readings:


Pain is one of the most common reasons that people seek medical attention in the United States today, with an estimated 60-100 million people suffering from a pain-related condition at any given time. In the year 2000, pain was designated as the “fifth vital sign” giving people the right to have their pain assessed and treated by their healthcare providers. A number of ethical dilemmas have surfaced since; including the increased/over-prescribing of opioid medications for patients with chronic pain, lack of oversight of suspicious dispensing of opioid analgesics by pharmaceutical companies and drug distributors, along with abuse, misuse, and addiction related to these medications. The “opioid overdose epidemic” has led to the dilemma of balancing the safe, compassionate and effective treatment of chronic pain and negative outcomes (including overdose deaths) associated with the increased use of medications used to achieve these goals. Additionally, deadly illicit opioids such as fentanyl mixed with heroin and other illicit substances have further blurred the lines between responsible parties for this increasing epidemic. The emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic in some ways has magnified the societal impact of these phenomena. This session along with reading materials will provide a forum for discussion and analysis of this important situation facing healthcare and society today
**Readings:**


Wamsley, L. Fentanyl Surpasses Heroin as Drug Most Often Involved In Deadly Overdoses. NPR. December 12, 2018.

**DUE: Chart Note 1 from cases from week 4 & 5**

**Week 7 (October 8): Ethical Considerations during the COVID Pandemic**  
(Phyllis Migdal, MD, MA)

Multiple ethical issues and dilemmas have been exposed during the COVID pandemic. Key considerations include allocation of scarce resources, including ventilators, PPE, and staffing. Large health disparities have been revealed in the health care system in the U.S. that highlights the experience of vulnerable populations and as vaccine trials are underway in the hopes of developing a vaccine ethical questions arise regarding who should get the vaccine first and what
if a large portion of the population refuses to take the vaccine. A survey of these issues will be discussed in this class.

Readings:
TBD

**Week 8 (October 15): Nutrition/Feeding/PEGS**

One of the complications of later-stage Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and other advanced dementias is the difficulty associated with adequate feeding and nutrition. Early in the course of the disease, this may manifest simply as irregular feeding patterns. As neurologic function becomes increasingly compromised, patients eventually suffer a lack of control over swallowing both solids and liquids. Family and friends are often faced with the unfortunate reality of watching a loved one suffer not only the drawn-out cognitive decline associated with these diseases, but also a terminal stage whereby achieving basic nutrition and hydration becomes an everyday challenge. Through the 1980's and mid-1990's, application of the PEG (percutaneous endoscopic gastronomy) tube (invented in 1979) procedure toward patients with advanced dementia became commonplace, and replaced the older practice of assisted oral feeding. The relatively simple procedure, which passes a feeding tube directly through the nearby skin and then directly into the stomach itself, was thought to present a humane method for keeping these patients adequately fed and hydrated by bypassing the compromised swallowing mechanism. It was also hoped that PEG tube placement would reduce associated complications such as bed sores from malnutrition and aspiration pneumonia from poor swallowing. However, by 2000 a number of key articles were published seriously questioning the value and the ethics of PEG use in individuals with end-stage AD. Since then debate has raged over the PEG and its uses among deeply forgetful people.

Our session will focus on the clinical ethical literature around this topic, which we will discuss in detail. We will also examine a number of clinical cases where PEG use is considered.

**Readings:**
TBD

**DUE: Position Paper 1 based on topics from weeks 1 - 7**

**Week 9 (October 22): Oncology**
(Jean Callaghan RN, Gabrielle Gerber RN)

We will examine the ramifications of ethics in the clinical setting. Our readings and discussions will realistically demonstrate the interrelationship between compassionate care, empathy, professional obligations, and the ethical struggles encountered while addressing the desires of patients, families and the requirements of the hospital and government regulations.

**Readings**


Cases

**Week 10 (October 29): Bone Marrow Transplant**
(Jeanine Carlson RN, Kathleen Scotto-DiMaso RN)

Bone marrow transplant raises many clinical ethical issues. For example, does a young brother or sister really want to become a donor, or is it really just family pressure and expectation
that is at work? What about parents who bring a child into the world with the intent of using it as a donor?

Readings

HJ Deeg, “Treatment Ethics, Quality of Life and Health Economics in the Management of Hematopoietic Malignancies in Older Patients,” Bone Marrow Transplantation, Vol. 50, 2015, pp. 1145-1149.  
http://www.nature.com/bmt/journal/v50/n9/full/bmt2015130a.html?foxtrotcallback=true

Winnie S. Wang et al., “Advance Care Planning and Palliative Care Integration for Patients Undergoing Hematopoietic Stem-Cell Transplantation,” J of Oncology Practice, on-line June 2017.


due: Chart note 2

Week 11 (November 5): Palliative Care  
(Laureen Diot ANP-C, WCC, ACHPN)

Palliative care medicine encompasses the care of patients and families during serious, possibly life-threatening illnesses. The goals of ensuring that patient preferences are met along with providing the relief of pain and suffering are important aspects of palliative care. The differences with hospice care will be discussed and how ethical guidelines can be used to help the patient and family make decisions about their care.

Readings:

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1255938/


Week 12 (November 12): Full Discussion of Jonsen, Siegler, Winslade (Migdal)

In class presentation of a topic of interest from your readings in the text. Explore the clinical ethical issue in depth and the key take-aways or learning points as the topic relates to ethical decision making. You can work in groups of 2-3 students if areas of interest are similar. Please inform me of the topic and members of the group the week prior to this session.


Week 13 (November 19) Student Presentations on Position Papers (Migdal)

In class discussion of a topic of interest to each student. Please select a topic and prepare a “Big Question” from one of the areas of interest in the Jonsen, Siegler, and Winslade text. You should be able to lead ~10-minute discussion about this topic that explores your Big Question in-depth. Consider if you would like to show a video or other information to add to the discussion.

Week 14 (December 3) Student Presentations on Position Papers

**DUE: Position Paper 2 based on a topic from week 8 - 12**

**GRADING**

On all papers include:
- Name on title page
- Page number
- APA or MLA in-text and reference list citations

Absences:
- Must be excused prior to class
- If you miss more than one class or if absence was not excused a 3-5 page write-up is required about the topic of the week you missed.

1. Students will be asked to turn in 2 ethics chart notes following a specific template that we will discuss early in the course. Each chart note will be worth 15 points (30%).
2. Students will lead an in-class ~10-minute discussion of a topic of interest from the Clinical Ethics text. (10%)

3. Students will turn in two 5-7 page position papers on any topic covered in the course, drawing from the assigned readings from a single week. You may use the topic as a spring board for your thoughts and positions that go beyond the discussion in class. Outside resources may be used to contribute to the strength of your position. The topic for Position Paper #1 will be chosen from lectures 1-7 and from lectures 8-12 for Position Paper #2. Students should select a topic from the week that engages them.

   a. Format:
      i. The first paragraph should begin with a relevant Big Question, followed by some explanation of why the question is important.
      ii. The second paragraph should pose an answer (thesis) to the Big Question that takes a clear position, followed by some explanation of how you will elaborate on it in the main body of the paper.
      iii. The main body of the paper should begin with a section that develops your thesis, and one that takes on any arguments against it and rebuts them.
      iv. The final section should be a conclusion that points toward a further question that you will not address at this time. So:

BIG QUESTION and significance
THESIS (ANSWER) and how you will proceed
THESIS DEVELOPMENT
COUNTERPOSITIONS AND THEIR REBUTTAL
CONCLUSION

Re-read the readings for the week you have chosen to write about, think about some question that are of interest to you, and try to respond to it in depth.

Each will contribute 15% of their grade. (30%)

4. In class presentation of one of your positions based on either the first or second position paper. (10%)

5. Students will write a 2-3 page reflection concerning the ethical challenges COVID-19 exposed in health care, using in-class material and/or outside readings (10%)

6. The remaining 10% will be class attendance, assigned readings and participation. It is important to be an active and vocal contributor to discussion.

   a. Please note attendance requirements

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Stony Brook campus: Americans with Disabilities Act: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Academic Integrity: Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report and suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (Schools of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/ Critical Incident Management: Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students’ ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and School of Medicine are required to follow their school specific procedures.