

Capstone for Impact Submission | GY2019

Project Title: Ethics and Decision Making: How should a physician respond to a patient's pain when new opioid prescribing laws limit shared decision-making?

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Advisor Names(s): Christian Vercler

Branch: Diagnostics & Therapeutics

Path of Excellence: Ethics

Handover/Transition:

If this project can be continued by another UMMS student, you may contact them at the following email address/phone number (N/A if project cannot be handed over): **N/A**

Summary:

For my impact project, I will be submitting an ethics case discussion to JAMA Ethics. My impact project also fulfills my Ethics pathway of excellence capstone requirement. Working with Dr. Vercler as my advisor, our article explores how shared decision making may be impacted by new opioid prescribing laws.

In this article, we present a case discussion with the goal of answering the question: how should a physician respond to a patient's pain when new opioid prescribing laws limit shared decision-making? The medical case presented is archetypal of a complex outpatient visit and highlights the potential conflict between the idealized patient-physician relationship promoted by shared decision making and the pragmatic concerns of operating a busy outpatient practice that must comply with new legal regulations. Through the lens of this case, we discuss innovations in decision science, how our preconceived notions regarding the level of trust in the physician-patient relationship influence our analysis of the decision-making process, and how legal requirements influence a physician's medical practice.

Ethics Questions that will be explored include:

1. Which innovations in decision science could illuminate something interesting, important, or neglected about a physician's decision about how to respond to a patient?
2. How does whether physician and/or patient trust each other influence how we reason about this case and about how we conceive potential consequences to the patient-physician relationship?

3. Should physicians disclose to patients how legal requirements (and the practice constraints they can generate) influence the options they offer to patients?

We are currently working on finalizing a manuscript which we plan to submit in April 2019 to the JAMA editors. The article has been tentatively marked for inclusion in a late 2019 issue of JAMA Ethics.

Methodology:

The paper is being written around a hypothetical clinical situation developed in collaboration with Doctor Vercler. Literature review, bioethical principles, and contemporary media have been studied to develop a case discussion for submission.

Results/Conclusion:

Shared Decision Making may be negatively impacted by new state laws aimed at regulating opioid prescriptions. The new laws potentially create a new practice paradigm that may interfere with the ethical principles of patient autonomy, beneficence, and justice.

Reflection/Lessons Learned:

A key takeaway from this project is that attempts at legislating policy may have unintended negative consequences. On its face, efforts to regulate the prescription of opioids seem like a common-sense attempt to mitigate the ongoing opioid crisis. However, these regulations may place the physician-patient relationship, and patient-wellbeing, at risk due to the practical realities of their implementation.