

Ethical issues in pain management

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"We must all die. But that I can save ... [someone] from days of torture, that is what I feel is my great and ever new privilege".

Dr Albert Schweitzer

Aims

- ▶ Explain the concept of an ethical principle and how it relates to the management of pain.

Some words about pain

- ▶ Pain experiences may include acute and chronic pain, pain from a chronic deteriorating condition, or pain as one of many symptoms of the patient receiving palliative care.
- ▶ Pain is not exclusively physiological but also includes spiritual, emotional and psychosocial dimensions.

The goal of pain management



throughout the life cycle is the same –
to address the dimensions of pain and to provide
maximum pain relief with minimal side effects.

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- ▶ First, pain, whether acute or chronic, is inadequately addressed for a variety of cultural, attitudinal, educational, political, religious, and logistical reasons.
 - ▶ Second, inadequately treated pain has major physiological, psychological, economic, and social ramifications for patients, their families and society.
 - ▶ Third, it is within the capacity of all developed and many developing countries to significantly improve the treatment of pain.

CONSEQUENCES OF INADEQUATELY TREATED PAIN

- ▶ Physiological and Psychological

- ▶ Social and Economic

Ethical Principles

- ▶ respect for human life and dignity;
- ▶ beneficence;
- ▶ autonomy;
- ▶ honesty;
- ▶ justice.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE AND DIGNITY

- ▶ It requires that “individuals be treated as unique and equal to every other individual and that special justification is required for interference with an individual’s own purposes, privacy, and behavior”

(Rawls, 1971).

When applied to pain management, respect for human life and dignity means health care professionals:

- ▶ Attend to every report of pain by clients or their families.
- ▶ Regard the personal privacy of clients as they deal with pain.
- ▶ Respect the lifestyle, personhood, and belief systems of clients.
- ▶ Strive to sustain human life and dignity while relieving pain and suffering.

BENEFACTENCE

- ▶ not inflicting harm;
- ▶ preventing harm;
- ▶ removing harm;
- ▶ promoting and doing good.

When applied to pain management, beneficence means health care professionals

- ▶ Believe clients when they report pain.
- ▶ Carefully assess their level of pain.
- ▶ Provide timely, appropriate interventions to relieve pain.
- ▶ Accurately evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention.
- ▶ Communicate the effectiveness of interventions to other healthcare members.
- ▶ Give clients nonpossessive warmth, accurate empathy, and unconditional positive regard.

AUTONOMY

- ▶ Autonomy is the right of self-determination, independence, and freedom.

When applied to pain management, autonomy means health care professionals

- ▶ Inform clients about available options for pain management.
- ▶ Make sure clients fully understand the actions and risks of pain-relieving options.
- ▶ Allow clients enough time to consider pain-relieving alternatives.
- ▶ Accept decisions clients make regarding management of their pain.
- ▶ Implement and evaluate pain-relieving interventions chosen by clients.

HONESTY (TRUTHFULNESS)

- ▶ Honesty means communicating the truth in word and deed.

When applied to pain management, the ethical principle of honesty means health care professionals

- ▶ Provide factual information about treatment options, including benefits and risks.
- ▶ Use language that is clear and appropriate to the age and capacity of the client.
- ▶ Encourage client participation in pain-management decisions.
- ▶ Convey genuine concern when giving unwelcome information.
- ▶ Report and record critical data accurately, regardless of personal consequences.

JUSTICE

- ▶ Justice implies fairness and equality.

When applied to pain management, the ethical principle of justice means means health care professionals

- ▶ Attend to complaints of pain by clients, no matter how difficult they may be.
- ▶ Assess pain and intervene to relieve pain with equal diligence for all clients.
- ▶ Evaluate and communicate information about pain with fairness and lack of bias.

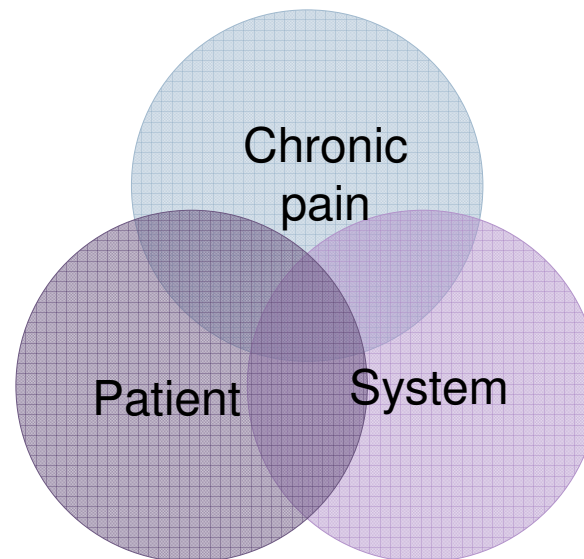
Ethical Dilemmas

- ▶ An ethical dilemma is a moral problem that requires a choice between two or more opposite actions, each of which is based on an ethical principle.

Ethical decision-making process such as the following:

- ▶ Gather relevant facts about the client's age, diagnosis, and circumstances and the ethical stance of the decision-maker (deontological or teleological)
- ▶ Identify and clearly state the problem
- ▶ List alternative actions, together with ethical principles that support each action
- ▶ Determine who can make the decision and assist that person to make it
- ▶ Provide emotional support to all involved parties

Ethical dilemma in chronic pain: why and in whom it appears



Some important factors

- ▶ Treating the symptoms, not the disease: The primary objective is to treating the symptom (pain) and not the cause.
- ▶ Vulnerability of patients: These are patients where ethical dilemma is more likely to develop, such as those (a) desperate nature of pain make them trying any thing. (b) who can not communicate (infant, elderly, in ICU) (c) cancer patients (d) dying patients and (e) economically disadvantage patients. This later group in particular, tests the ethical principle of “justice”.
- ▶ Psychiatric problems : Chronic pain patients might have significant psychiatric problem existed premorbidly but may also be reactive to pain and/ or the lack of relief and exacerbated by iatrogenic or traumatic injuries.
- ▶ Patient-Physician relationship: The patient-physician relation-ship in chronic pain arena can be quite difficult due to complexity of chronic pain and prior failed attempts at relief, which can lead to anger on the part of patient and frustration on the part of provider.

- ▶ **Litigation:** Many chronic patients are in litigation as a result of conditions of the onset of their pain, which frequently is the result of road traffic accident or an accident on the job. Litigation is a very powerful secondary gain issue, which may consciously or subconsciously reinforce pain, illness behaviour, and health care utilization. It often works against the goals of treatment. The ethical dilemma becomes whether or how to treat the patient in the face of such a powerful reinforcer of pain.
- ▶ **Unproven Methods:** Some interventions used by pain centers have not been shown in scientific manner to be efficacious. Additionally the growing popularity and acceptance by medical community of complementary techniques, which are used most often for pain further intensifies the ethical dilemma of using or referring patients for unproven techniques.
- ▶ **Financial pressure:** The clinician may be under pressure to do higher reimbursement. Patients can be categorized as more, less or not profitable