

Moral theology of health care

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Bioethics is a recently coined word. It comes from “ bio” which means life and from “ ethics” which is morality. Bioethics is that branch of Ethics which deals directly with the problems of life and dying, of health and of healing. It focuses attention to the need for a healthier world in accordance with the dictates of reason.

As a health care provider, they are face with many ethical issues left and right. These issues sometimes question our integrity as humans with compassion and concern for others. They say that health care providers are sometimes called an accomplice whenever they have done an unlawful thing which is not legal for their chosen profession. Respect for persons, justice, and beneficence, autonomy has been a major workhorse in bioethical analysis over the past several decades.

First, let us discuss the respect for persons, justice, beneficence and autonomy. This entails the dignity that we have as human beings. That as human, we have every right to do things and that we should be respected for it. We should respect individuals as well as their lives. As a health care provider, it is our duty to preserve life and not to destroy it. Health care providers often deal with critical situations where human life is at stake, both in the community and in particular health settings. Thus, it is very important that they understand and respect the sanctity of human life. During such situations they may be forced to decide whether or not to perform clinical procedures to preserve health and save the lives of people in a community.

Abortion, we all know that Life is precious. It is our main concern and duty. Health is our personal responsibility. This requires that we adopt a style of life

that fosters health. We owe it to our family and society to be healthy. The cost of health care is becoming expensive everyday. It is a crime of gross injustice when, because of our reckless habits, we force our family to suffer financial losses and indebtedness.

But do we really care about the life which God has bestowed in us? Yes, certainly we do but there are some women choose to abort the life that is in them for some irrefutable reasons. Many agree to abortion depends to the circumstances but how about the women who just do not want to have kids? Is it reasonable that they just abort the " life" because they want to avoid responsibilities? Absolutely, not! Human life is sacred because conception, from the beginning, already involves the creative action of God.

As human beings, we remain forever in a special relationship with the Creator. Human life is endowed with majesty and dignity which call forth for an equally dignified response. We owe human life respect and reverence. Such reverence, respect, and concern for life is a way of saying " yes" to God's concern for human life in all its forms. In this complex world that we live in today, abortion and contraception are two of the most hotly- debated issues. They pose a serious moral challenge particularly to medical practitioners and health service providers who are supposed to preserve and protect human life.

Thus a thorough understanding of these issues is necessary to arrive at logical and moral solutions. Still the fact remains that neither abortion nor contraception are desirable in human society. Their prevention should be a shared task that rises above the debates on the morality of abortion or contraception. The sanctity of human life demands that it must be respected

and protected absolutely from the moment of a conception. From the first moment of her existence, a human being already possesses the rights of a person and that as health care providers we should greatly respect, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being.

This alienable right must be recognized and respected by civil society, political authority and health care professionals. Abortion destroys life and violates the right to life. As such it is morally evil and it should not be in any way legalized and liberally permitted in the laws and constitution of the nation as well as in the ethics of the health care professionals.

Euthanasia is one of the most debatable issues of our society today. Many disagree with this practice but others say that it is the only way of ending the agony of the patient. So if this issue is still argued, in what circumstance it becomes right? Euthanasia is the killing, for reasons of mercy, of a person who is suffering from an incurable illness or hopeless injury. Euthanasia is an ancient concept that has in the past been an acceptable practice in certain societies; for example, in ancient Greece. In modern times, however, euthanasia is generally considered murder by the law and also is most of the world's organized religions.

Passive, or negative, euthanasia does not involve the act of killing. It consists of the withdrawal of, or the deliberate failure to initiate, life-sustaining treatment in hopeless cases. Instead of being kept alive for days or weeks through various kinds of machines and drugs, the patient is simply allowed to die.

Moreover, “ euthanasia” derives from the Greek words Eu which means good and Thanatos which means death. It etymologically signifies “ good health,” a pleasant and gentle death without awful suffering. Euthanasia may be defined as an action or omission that by its very nature, or in the intention, causes death, for the purpose of eliminating whatever pain.

Furthermore, the issue of death has become more complicated than it is used to be because of ethical conflict. The moral issue of euthanasia revolves around the preservation of human dignity in death even to the individual’s last breath. This issue has both its positive and negative sides.

The positive argument states that euthanasia aims to preserve human dignity until death. Not only does one have a duty to preserve life but one also has the right to die with dignity. To die with dignity means that one should be better than to go on living with an incurable and distressing sickness.

The negative argument, on the other hand, declares that euthanasia erodes human dignity because it means cowardliness in the face of pain and suffering. People who have faced the realities of life with courage die with dignity.

Whereas the positive side insists that mercy killing preserves human dignity, the negative side claims the opposite since the act hastens the death of an individual. Furthermore, others consider euthanasia to be morally wrong because it is intentional killing which opposes the natural moral law or the natural inclination to preserve life. They even argue that euthanasia may be performed for self-interest or other consequences. Also, doctors and other

health care professionals may be tempted not to do their best to save the patient. They may resort not to do their best to save the patient. They may resort to euthanasia as an easy way out and simply disregard any other alternatives.

Physician assisted suicide is the type of suicide assisted by a physician. The physician prescribes or administers a drug that could lead the patient to death. One way to distinguish between euthanasia and assisted suicide is to look at the last act, the act by which death occurred.

Using this distinction, if a third party performed the last act that intentionally caused a patient's death, euthanasia occurred. For example, giving a patient a lethal injection or pulling a plastic bag over her head to suffocate her would be considered euthanasia.

On the other hand, if the person who died performed the last act, assisted suicide took place. Thus it is assisted suicide if a person swallowed an overdose of drugs provided by a doctor for the purpose of causing death. It is also assisted suicide if a patient pushed a switch to trigger a fatal injection after the doctor inserted an intravenous needle into the patient's vein. A lot of people think that assisted suicide is needed so patients will not be forced to remain alive by being "hooked up" to machines. There are laws that permit patients or their surrogates to withhold or withdraw unwanted medical treatment even if that increases the likelihood that the patient will die. Thus, no one needs to be hooked up to machines against his or her will.

Neither the law nor the medical ethics requires that "everything be done" to keep a person alive. Insistence, against the patient's wishes, that death be

postponed by every means available is contrary to law and practice. It is also cruel and inhuman.

There comes a time when continued attempts to cure are no longer compassionate, wise or medically sound. On such situations, hospice, including in-home hospice care, can be of great help. That is the time when all efforts should be directed at making the patient's remaining time comfortable. Then, all interventions should be directed to the alleviation of pain and other symptoms as well as to the provision of emotional and spiritual support for both the patient and the patient's loved ones.

Medicine is at the service of life. Since the beginning medical practitioners have struggled to conserve health, alleviate suffering and as much as they can, prolong life. Nobody escapes death, as death is inevitable. It is a fearful reality. However, acceptance of death would "perhaps be easier and more meaningful if one lives life to the fullest and strive to give meaning to his/her existence.'

Today, the span of human life has considerably lengthened than during the past decades, thanks to significant achievements in the medical field. However, life will remain a journey and man will continue his pilgrimage towards his final destiny. Surely, man will reach a point when neither the physician nor modern medicine can do more for him. As one poet states: "It is sheer madness of a man to cling to his life when God wills that he die." Nurses play a vital role in a patient's struggle against illness. Are nurses allowed to cut the thread of life when the weight of pain, suffering and hopelessness has become too heavy for the patient to bear? Can we "plan" for our death, just as we plan for our future?

While health providers strive to render the best care for patients, situations arise when the patients themselves demand for assistance to have their lives ended. During such situations, health care providers and medical practitioners are expected to act morally and justify their stand.

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