

Autonomy-in regards to decision making in healthcare and research



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Autonomy in Healthcare and Research Decision Making Autonomy within the context of medicine is defined as the right possessed by the patient to decide what treatment to choose, without influence from medical professionals. Autonomy in medical practice is one of the pillars that define medicine professional ethics, alongside beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, dignity, truthfulness and honesty. Human autonomy is a natural right that an individual uniquely possesses, and ethical provisions state that the professional dealing with such a patient must respect their decisions before making their own decisions. The medical professional is therefore within the confinements of ethical judgment that the individual autonomy is respected. Beauchamp and Childress (2008) highlighted the four main ethical principles as discussed below.

Principle of Respect for Patients' Autonomy

Patients' autonomy which entails their rights to be heard concerning their views on the treatment they are to be given must be considered. Even if the patients' views may seem uninformed and unjustifiable in questioning a particular form of treatment that the medical professional is subjecting them to, they have a right to do so. The professional should go as far as possible to bear with the patient's despite the possibility of the patient being unreasonable. For instance, a patient may resist the decision of the medical professional to apply an injection as a method of drug administration, without considerations on the options that the professional has for the same. But with the ethical considerations, autonomy exercised by the patient leaves some tolerance room on the part of the professional. Time should be taken to discern if the patients' questioning of the decision to be injected has information of available options as well as the underlying reasons.

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Nature of Autonomy

Autonomy is uniquely possessed by different individuals as an element of independence in decision making. Self direction in decision making determines the level of autonomy that the individual exercises. Alternatively, human beings strive to be rational in making decisions that make their lives better. Every human being has an equal right of existence; hence autonomy is a measure of equality.

Capacity for Autonomous Choice

An autonomous choice is allowed by medical professionals only to the extent that it do not endanger the life of the patient. This implies that if the patient does not make an informed decision when refusing the type of treatment proposed by the medical profession, the autonomy does not qualify. Human beings need to feel free in make decisions about their own lives but where issues arise on their health safety as well of the other people, they lose the freedom.

Informed Consent

For effective autonomy to take place, the patient must be served with the relevant information about a certain medical question that they make a decision on. Agreement of the patient must be sought before carrying out a procedure whose implications the patient doesn't know. . Patients may refute medical professional's decisions due to ignorance of the underlying factors, which should be eliminated in autonomous decisions. Medical confidentiality is closely linked to informed consent, where the patient needs to be made aware of use of his or her details by a third party.

Disclosure

A patient's autonomy is determined by their willingness to open up and feel
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free to share information with the medical professional for the resolution of the health issue at hand. If the patient feels threatened in making disclosures, it may be an indicator of breach of autonomy.

Understanding

Patients and practitioners must come to an amicable conclusion about the choice of the patient in order for the spirit of autonomy to thrive. Some patients have a wide understanding of the medical question surrounding their case while others don't. Decision making in healthcare should therefore have elements of tolerance and understanding between the parties.

Ignorance of medical issues exposes patients to poor and misuse of autonomy.

Voluntariness

Autonomy is manifested in cases where the patient exercises freedom and unrestricted space to make informed decisions. Free will must always be free of undue influence when the patient makes decisions concerning healthcare.

Framework of Standards for Surrogate Decision Making

Healthcare providers are mandated to ensure alternative decisions in form of surrogate decision makers that scrutinize autonomous decisions.

Work Cited

Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress J. F., Principles of Biomedical Ethics. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008. Print.