

Utilitarianism and biomedical ethics

Philosophy



Ethical Dilemma Utilitarianism and a Decision Ethical Decision This patient is 71 years old and has metastatic lung cancer. She has been very happy, lives by herself and volunteers at a senior center. She has had three years in which she treated her cancer and allowed chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, after which she became dependent on night time oxygen. Her cancer continues to progress. Her physician wants her to try an experimental chemotherapy that has a 15% chance of putting this cancer in remission. She decides not to do this. She feels she would rather die than go through another treatment, one that will remove her from her home and put her in the hospital for treatment. This paper will discuss this patient's decision in light of the utilitarian theory of biomedical ethics.

" Utilitarianism holds that the best option is the one that does the most expected good (Beauchamp & Idress, 2005). Stuart Mill defines utilitarian ethical philosophy as that which defines a good action as the one that maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain to as many people as possible (Feldman, 2006). In other words, the consequences of the decision should be better than any of the other possible decisions. In this case, by utilitarian rules, there are other people to consider such as children and grandchildren. The need to prolong life to its maximum accompanies our success with medicine and society's need for a long and healthy life. It used to be that people watched while loved ones suffered toward their deaths with a critical illness. This has been replaced with the philosophy that death should be stalled by using every advanced technology available (Trnobranski, 1996). This then creates a moral issue for many kinds including the understanding of what prolonging life means and what terminal illness means. The need for healthcare professionals to feel they have intervened in the life of a case has <https://assignbuster.com/utilitarianism-and-biomedical-ethics/>

promoted the need to have an ethical professional code. The primary duty of all healthcare professionals is "not to inflict harm."

There too, of course is the argument of omission versus actually giving a lethal injection. The view that does seem to be supported by all of the resources review is this. Quality of life determines whether a treatment is ordinary or extraordinary is unimportant. What is important is whether the effectiveness of the treatment in questions will provide or destroy the quality of life (Trnobranski, 1996).

This patient has done, already everything that her healthcare team thought would work. She has had extra time with her family and has led a happy life. In the utilitarian point of view, the best thing for the most people is to let her make the decision not to be admitted to the hospital and have the new chemotherapy regime. The reasons are that her family would be better off to have her a short time in reasonable condition to spend time with them and certainly it is her point of view that her quality of life would be better. Quality does not mean length but what is best for everyone. The new chemo only gives a possible 15% chance of remission which is poor at best and that alone provides her with incentive to enjoy what time she can.

Healthcare believes that suicide is bad, so does religion. Remember that Stuart Mills tells us that when there is little space between bad and good, it has to be determined that there is no moral dilemma. The goal then is to expand the place between bad and good allowing for understanding of the moral part of the dilemma to become apparent. In the case of this patient, the place between bad and good is expanded when we allow the patient to make her own choice and the moral dilemma is then solved. .

In conclusion, the utilitarian point of view is controversial. Some say it could
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be used to limit healthcare based on the need to curtail costs and use limited resources. However, in this case, it makes the decision much easier than had any other approach been used. Best is defined by all of us differently and only this patient can determine best for her but certainly best for all is not to damage the quality of the life she has left.

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