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Ethical Strange Fruit

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Editor- Online Journal of Health Ethics

This last issue of 2019 contains six very diverse, yet connected, offerings whose ethical presentations impact us all. Dr. Zhong and colleagues at the School of Medicine of University of Pennsylvania and Yale University School of Forestry, team in a qualitative study to determine medical resident's exposure and mastery of ethical training. Given the mandate that physicians obtain informed consent from patients, one would be inclined to think that physicians were abreast of the nuances of what constituted informed consent and how to obtain it. Unfortunately, their study revealed that at that school, much more was still needed to educate residents on informed consent. One can safely speculate that instruction in ethics may also languish at other schools and medicine and beyond. We still have work to do.

Researchers at Jackson State University – Dr. Lolita Gray, and Dr. Glenn Johnson of Texas Southern University investigated the disproportionate occurrence of asthma among citizens of Mississippi and its associated socioeconomic impacts. They conclude that mandated, systematic reporting of asthma should be implemented and infer that this mandate may lead to a decrease in asthma disparity; and, thereby result in a better quality of life among those communities. If this is indeed the case, there appears to be a moral imperative to mandate reporting. A problem cannot be addressed if it is not known. It is logical that mandated reporting is an important first work in solving the problem. Thank you for sharing your observations. Article three by Reilly McQueston, and Dr. Peter A. DePergola also address a public moral imperative. They examine the extent to which public health workers such as first responders, police officers, firefighters, etc. are provided with adequate mental health training to protect them. They argue that given the ever mounting statistics regarding suicide, depression and PTSD among these service workers, society has a moral imperative to be much more intentional in protecting their mental health. They based their argument upon a very caring and humanistic moral obligation.

The last three articles move from the present and jettison us into the future. Dr. George Gellert explores the burgeoning business of Fake Medical News in article four, and tackles the explosive and frightening topic of nuclear war with North Korea in article five. Both have huge ethical implications for the public. Our 2019 issue ends with the work of the OJHE Associate Editor, Dr. Peter DePergola, on the topic of the Bionic Brain. As the leading news outlets scramble with the transition from a paper format to an electronic format, these changes come with huge economic cutbacks. This change is likened to the societal switch from stamped letters and cards sent through the U.S. Postal Service to email, text messages, Instagram and other social media platforms. This switch resulted in the Postal Service reinventing itself and privatization. For leading newspapers, Gellert

contends that they are reverting to the change by lowering standards and permitting advertisements from companies of products that make claims of clinical efficacy and safety without any supportive substantiating evidence consequently, the unsuspecting public is duped by the claims that come from these longstanding 'reputable' publishers. Included are several ads that substantiate this claim. The implications are that people will rely so much on these powerful advertisements and may be neglecting a serious undiagnosed problem. This is unethical. He calls upon health care providers to arise and rally in an effort to protect the public from fallacious, potentially dangerous practice. Regarding Gellert's second article on nuclear war, it is not for the faint of heart. Actual projections are given for potential loss of life if there is a 'limited' nuclear strike on the 20 largest cities in the U.S. In essence, there will be from 9.7 million fatalities and another 16.8 million injuries. Truth be told, this type of atrocity would obliterate all health care service programs, organizations, etc. Yet, there is continual talk, threats, jokes, and other innuendos from world leaders about this possibility. Gellert argues that whether to engage in a limited nuclear war cannot rest upon just a few leaders. All, especially those who have the burden of being care givers must ensure that national and world leaders and the public *fully* understand the grave implications for life on earth as we know it if there is a 'limited' nuclear war of any kind.

Last, the strangest of the fruit, resides upon the bionic brain. Dr. DePergola's essay center on the implications of building upon the capacity to alter neurocognitive conceptions of reality. Examined are concepts of memory, executive function, and emotional health and personality in the context of neurocognitive enhancement. He posits the argument that neurocognitive enhancement can be justified as morally plausible in its potential to edify the caliber of overall cognition. This, he contends will facilitate one to make pragmatically, robust moral decision on the condition that it (1) promotes general moral character, (2) complements human nature, and (3) effects a deeper sense of individual and social identity.

On another note, the editor and staff of the Online Journal of Health Ethics thank you for your support over the years by sharing your scholarship with us as authors and reviewers. We especially thank Josh Cromwell of The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) for serving as the manager, for The USM for hosting the journal on their Aquila server, for our Associate Editor, Dr. Peter DePergola, and for all others involved in making this journal a success. We are close to 300,000 downloads.

From us to you: Have a joyous holiday season and a very happy and prosperous New Year!

Sheila

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