

A virtue ethics approach to moral dilemmas in medicine

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J Med Ethics 2003;29:297-302

Most moral dilemmas in medicine are analyzed using the four principles with some consideration of consequentialism but these frameworks have limitations. It is not always clear how to judge which consequences are best. When principles conflict it is not always easy to decide which should dominate. They also do not take account of the importance of the emotional element of human experience. Virtue ethics is a framework that focuses on the character of the moral agent rather than the rightness of an action. In considering the relationships, emotional sensitivities, and motivations that are unique to human society it provides a fuller ethical analysis and encourages more flexible and creative solutions than principlism or consequentialism alone. Two different moral dilemmas are analyzed using virtue ethics in order to illustrate how it can enhance our approach to ethics in medicine.