

# PHIL 226

## Biomedical Ethics

Week 6

Today: exam 1.  
Advance directives.  
Placebos.  
Thursday: guest  
lecture on  
confidentiality.  
No electronics.



# Proxies and Advance Directives

- Proxy: make a decision in the best interests of an incompetent person using the values that an objective reasonable person would use in the incompetent person's situation.
- Advance directive: a document that stipulates the nature of the health care that the person would like to receive when incompetent. = living will.

# For Advance Directives

- ADs extend patient autonomy.
- ADs promote fair treatment of incompetent patients.
- ADs reduce anguish in patients' family members who do not have to make decisions for them.
- ADs reduce psychologic distress of health care providers.
- ADs increase physician-patient communication.

# Against Advance Directives

- Wishes of competent people may project poorly onto future situations of incompetence.
- Equality does not require same treatment of incompetent persons.
- People change their minds without updating directives.
- ADs are biased toward refusal of treatment.
- ADs may restrict patients' rights, if limited to the terminally ill.
- ADs may fail to anticipate situations.
- ADs may undermine informed consent based on patient-doctor communication.

# Issues About Advance Directives

- What Form Should an Advance Directive Take?
- Should all patients be offered ADs?
- How often need ADs be updated?
- When are patients competent to change their minds?
- When should ADs be overruled?

# Discussion question

- Should advance directives about blood transfusions be followed? Would you want to have an advanced directive?

# Access to Medical Records

- Pro:
  - Patients have a legitimate interest in information about their health.
  - Doctors have a duty to act with good faith and loyalty.
- Con:
  - It may not be in the best interests of a patient to know too much.
  - Disclosure may cause unnecessary lawsuits.
  - Medical records may not be understood by the patient.
  - Doctors might keep less thorough notes.
  - Disclosure might hurt the patient or a third party.
  - Electronic records may be hacked.

# Placebos

- Placebo = treatment believed to be biologically ineffective but used anyway for psychological or experimental purposes.
- Placebo effect = change in a patient's condition due to symbolic value of a treatment rather than its biological effect.



# Against Placebos

- Placebos are deceptive and violate duties to tell the truth.
- Placebos violate patients' autonomy: right to choose treatment.
- Placebos can have bad consequences, e.g. when a patient loses trust in a doctors.

# For Placebos

- Placebos work: they make patients feel better, and may be biologically effective because of complex interactions between the brain and the immune system.
- Placebos are white lies.
- Placebos are not deceptions, if all the doctor says is that the treatment will make you feel better.

# Discussion question

Should doctors use placebos?