



6th International Conference on Clinical Ethics Consultation

May 11-14, 2010 ♦ Portland Art Museum ♦ Portland, Oregon, USA
www.ethics2010.org



Abstract Submission Form – Papers

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Proposed title of paper: Dignity and Health Care Ethics: A Canadian Perspective

Abstract with 3 clearly stated objectives in 250 words:

With the disbanding of the President's Council on Bioethics in 2009 it is unclear what role the principle of dignity will play in American health ethics discourse in the years to come. In Canada the future role of dignity is much clearer. In a series of cases the Supreme Court of Canada has chosen not to employ dignity as the informative principle when adjudicating health care disputes. I argue that this is due to the tendency of the Supreme Court to decide health law cases on the basis of rights to life, liberty and security of the person, rather than the right to equal treatment; significant because Canadian equality provisions are traditionally applied with reference to dignity. These decisions have led to the prevalence of a particular conception of dignity in Canada, whereby dignity is employed to empower human rights rather than to constrain action, providing the basis, for instance, of autonomy and medical self-determination.

Assuming dignity continues to play a background role in Canadian legal and bioethical discourse, what does this mean for ethicists in Catholic health care institutions, where dignity has traditionally held a more prominent role? I argue that clinical ethicists can uphold the dignity of patients by focusing, like the Supreme Court, on the empowerment of human rights. Understanding dignity as empowering of rights, rather than as a right unto itself, enables ethicists to address each fundamental right in turn and in doing so ensure respect for the human dignity of each patient.

Objectives:

1. Be able to articulate the two conceptions of dignity as proposed by Beyleveld and Brownsword: dignity as empowerment and dignity as constraint, as well as explain how each is employed in law and bioethics.

2. Understand the implications of the approach to dignity chosen by Canadian courts, especially as this relates to ethicists in health care organizations.

3. Learn what it means to respect human dignity through empowerment of human rights and how to incorporate these rights into ethically appropriate care plans.

If you have or will publish on this topic, please cite reference:

Are you planning to or will you be willing to submit a poster along with your paper?

Yes No