

Fundamental Impairments of Patient Autonomy: Their Risk Assessment among Patients and Healthcare Providers

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DESCRIPTION

Patient autonomy is a fundamental principle in modern healthcare, emphasizing the importance of respecting patients' rights to make informed decisions about their own medical care. It has changed the doctor-patient interaction and healthcare policies over time and is a tenet of medical ethics. Patient autonomy has not always been a recognized and respected principle in healthcare. Historically, medical decisions were predominantly made by healthcare providers, with patients having limited input or control over their own care. The concept of patient autonomy began to gain traction in the mid-20th century, influenced by significant social and cultural shifts.

The Nuremberg Code of 1947 set the groundwork for the moral treatment of human subjects in medical research. This code was created in response to the atrocities committed by Nazi doctors during World War II. It was a turning point in the acceptance of people's rights in medical decision-making because it underlined the significance of voluntarily given informed permission. Furthermore, the publication of the Belmont Report in 1979, which served as a guiding document for ethical principles in research involving human subjects, reiterated the importance of informed consent and autonomy. These developments not only influenced the practice of medical research but also began to create the doctor-patient relationship in clinical care.

The ethics of medicine are deeply ingrained in the concept of patient autonomy. It stands with beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice as one of the four fundamentals of biomedical ethics. This principle asserts that patients have the right to receive clear and understandable information about their medical condition, treatment options, risks, benefits, and alternatives. With this information, patients can make decisions that align with their values and preferences. Informed consent ensures that medical interventions are not imposed on individuals without their understanding and agreement. Patient autonomy is closely connected to the Kantian concept of respecting individuals as autonomous beings with the capacity for rational decision-making. Respecting persons means acknowledging their right to make choices and decisions about their own lives, including

medical treatment and it also recognizes the inherent value of personal choice and self-determination.

Patient autonomy has far-reaching implications for healthcare practice, influencing various aspects of patient care. Healthcare providers are ethically obligated to provide patients with comprehensive and understandable information about their condition and treatment options. As a result, patients are more encouraged to make decisions and feel more in control of their treatment. The shift from paternalistic medicine to shared decision-making is a key outcome of patient autonomy. In this approach, healthcare professionals collaborate with patients to make treatment decisions based on the best available evidence and the patient's preferences and values and it also extends to end-of-life decisions. Advance directives, such as living wills and durable powers of attorney for healthcare, allow individuals to specify their wishes regarding medical treatment in advance, ensuring that their autonomy is respected even when they are no longer able to express their preferences. Protecting patient autonomy involves safeguarding their right to privacy and confidentiality. Healthcare providers must respect patients' confidentiality by not disclosing their medical information without explicit consent, except in cases where disclosure is required by law or for the patient's safety.

Cultural sensitivity is essential in recognizing and respecting diverse patient perspectives on healthcare decisions. Healthcare providers should be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences that may influence patients' autonomy, decision-making processes, and values. While patient autonomy is a fundamental ethical principle, it is not without its challenges and ethical dilemmas. Balancing autonomy with other principles like beneficence and non-maleficence can be complex. Patients have the right to refuse treatment, even if it is in their best interest. Healthcare providers may face ethical problems when patients refuse life-saving interventions, and navigating this delicate balance can be challenging. Assessing a patient's decision-making capacity can be complex, especially when mental illness or cognitive impairment is involved. Deciding whether a patient has the capacity to make a particular decision while respecting their autonomy can be ethically challenging. Determining the extent of

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autonomy that should be granted to pediatric patients, especially adolescents can be a contentious issue. When a patient's values and choices conflict with a healthcare provider's moral or religious beliefs, problems may arise. Striking a balance between respecting autonomy and acting in accordance with one's conscience can be difficult. In a healthcare landscape that is increasingly patient-

centered, the principles of patient autonomy remain essential for empowering individuals to make decisions that align with their values and preferences. Respecting and upholding patient autonomy not only leads to better healthcare outcomes but also strengthens the trust and collaboration between patients and healthcare providers, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided.