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Advances in Medical Ethics

Welcome to Advances in Medical Ethics

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Abstract

While medical ethics has been considered since the early days of civilization, it has come into prominence over the course of the last century due to medical advances that have an impact upon a broad array of health issues ranging from conception to the end-of-life and beyond. In light of the pace and scope of current technological developments in medicine, medical ethics now has an even greater level of importance and relevance to biomedical science and clinical practice as the amount and uses of medical information reach even further into the unknown.

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Editorial

Medical practitioners are bound by standards of moral and ethical behavior toward their patients, as fundamentally embodied in the modern Hippocratic Oath. Thus, the four basic moral principles [1] encompassing autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice impact medical and human health issues that range from individual responsibilities [2] to government policies [3]. In addition to its relevance to diverse aspects of medicine, increasingly far-reaching medical technologies have thrust medical ethics into prominent legal debates regarding informed consent, end-of-life, and intellectual property issues. Aside from aspects such as surrogate decision-making and the need for special protection of those unable to consent [4], the age of personalized and/or high-technology medicine is making the task of informed consent and also the consideration of actions that benefit not only the individual but also the collective more arduous and complex [5]. This medical ethics scenario is further complicated by the moral, ethical and legal aspects of innovations in biotechnology and intellectual property ownership. For example, while the median survival for cystic fibrosis patients has surged from 6 months to 36.8 years, this extraordinary medical progress has come at an "unconscionable" price [6]. Similarly, there continues to be much debate regarding the exploitation and patentability of human genes for diagnostic and commercial purposes (e.g. BRCA1) [7]. Interestingly, while there is a global general consensus regarding difficult ethical issues, such as end-of-life treatments [8], similar to the financial accessibility of costly new therapies, legal rulings regarding ownership and use of biotechnology innovations can differ greatly from country to country [9].

It is clear that the field of medical ethics is an active and evolving area that is of general relevance to a broad spectrum of current medical and human health issues. In order to promote dissemination of information in this area and to stimulate discussion of medical ethics issues, we are pleased to announce the inaugural launch of the Journal. While medical ethics is already an active and dynamic area, further progression of medical technologies will no doubt continue to challenge our understanding and

acceptance of fundamentally novel changes, such as multiplex parenting [10] and the use of forensic psychiatry for legal purposes [11]. Our mission, therefore, is to provide biomedical scientists, clinicians, human health researchers, policy analysts and legal scholars further opportunity to publish new findings and opinions regarding aspects of medical ethics. The principal aim of the Journal is to publish articles from the full spectrum of medical ethics issues, ranging from biotechnology and clinical developments to public policy and legal rulings. All submitted articles will initially be screened by a member of the journal's Editorial Board and, if found to be suitable will be sent out for peer-review, by internationally recognized experts in a relevant area of medical ethics.

Accepted articles will be of the highest quality and can take the form of original research articles, reviews and commentaries providing pertinent, cutting edge updates in areas relevant to medical ethics. The Journal welcomes your submissions and hopes you will visit the website often to stay up-to-date with the latest articles.

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