



PRESS RELEASE

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Making a case for ethics in medical practice

NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine Launches Online Casebook on Medical Ethics; Enabled by the Lien Foundation and in partnership with The Hastings Center and University of Oxford's Ethox Centre

Physicians and allied healthcare professionals will soon have an online educational guide to help them understand key ethical situations that may arise in the care of medically complex patients.

Created as a means to enable broad-based discussion in ethically challenging medical situations, "Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families: A Singapore Casebook", aims to promote learning, teaching and discussion among healthcare professionals and medical students and teachers, by addressing some of the most complex but common issues in Singaporean healthcare, including care for the elderly and end-of-life care.

Written in a style that is accessible to a lay audience, this unique web-based learning resource may also serve as a platform for public, patient and policy education in healthcare ethics.

The casebook consists of 12 hypothetical cases created from information obtained from lengthy interviews with healthcare professionals, as well as workshops, conferences and discussion forums. It was collaboratively put together by the Centre for Biomedical Ethics at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, involving over 50 senior and junior healthcare professionals, as well as academic consultations with The Hastings Center, New York, and The Ethox Centre, University of Oxford. The project was enabled by the Lien Foundation.

Real people behind the stories

Based on real settings in acute, community and home care, the 12 case examples span a range of challenges in ethical decision-making relating to the care of young, adult and older patients. Each case is followed by a few questions for reflection, to help healthcare professionals think about the ethically challenging issues presented in a case and how they relate to their own experience. The cases are further supported by expert commentaries and a perspective of a Singaporean clinician, and supplemented with backgrounders, a glossary of key terms and other online resources.

The information was put together to help healthcare professionals in Singapore to recognise and respond to situations in their practice where they may face ethical uncertainty, said the Casebook's editor-in-chief, Dr Jacqueline Chin. She is with the Centre for Biomedical Ethics at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

One such case is that of Mr Shi, an elderly retired businessman who has long been concerned that he would develop Alzheimer's and who had previously told his son not to do anything extreme to keep him alive. Mr Shi has now developed some memory problems and an irregular heartbeat and his doctor recommends implanting a pacemaker. The doctor discusses his medical condition with his wife and son. Conflict arises when Mr Shi's family has differing views on how to proceed with his treatment.

Casebook stirs international interest

Said Dr Chin, "Seeing the ways that this web project might be used in Singapore and beyond local settings is an exciting prospect for the project team. Already, we've been taken by surprise by feedback on its potential uses. A Filipina clinician working in Singapore shared that it would be a good introduction to the Singapore healthcare system and practice setting for newcomers. Project team members have received inquiries from various countries like Australia and Israel, about how such a website might be created for their healthcare communities, so it is hoped that the site may also serve as a useful contribution to global education in healthcare ethics."

This is the second collaborative project with the Lien Foundation. The earlier ethics research project released in 2011, "What Doctors Say About Care of the Dying", revealed many challenges faced by doctors in their care for dying patients. As a way to continue discussions among physicians, caregivers, patients and policymakers, this online casebook was proposed.

Said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO of the Lien Foundation, "Doctors, patients and families often struggle with decisions in healthcare. With advances in medical technology and therapeutics, the ground for options and questions has widened. However, the ethical foundations of the healthcare profession must remain in sharp focus even as the field grows more complex.

This initiative has provided doctors with a safe platform to collectively share, navigate and resolve conflicts that commonly arise from caring for the sick and the

dying. The casebook is not only a practical resource for doctors, it is also their litmus response to the quandaries of care as they seek to uphold a competent and compassionate practice, one trusted by patients and the public.”

Describing how it would help, Dr Lisa Wong, a Resident at the Department of Paediatric, NUH, said the casebook would be particularly useful as a learning tool as it increases her exposure to difficult situations and gets her thinking through the ethical issues before they occur in real life. The casebook would help her prepare better and give her the confidence in tackling such problems if and when they arise, she added.

The casebook will be launched on 19 January 2014 and will be featured in an international ethics conference taking place here from 19 to 20 January 2014, during which participants will be introduced to the casebook and ways that it can be used for teaching and learning. The two-day conference will also cover topics such as decision-making involving severely ill children and the elderly, walking alongside the chronically ill, family involvement and patient confidentiality, and the ethics of withholding or withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment.

Ends

To view the casebook, please visit www.bioethicscasebook.sg

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About the National University of Singapore (NUS)

A leading global university centred in Asia, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education and research, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise.

NUS has 16 faculties and schools across three campuses. Its transformative education includes a broad-based curriculum underscored by multi-disciplinary courses and cross-faculty enrichment. Over 37,000 students from 100 countries enrich the community with their diverse social and cultural perspectives.

NUS has three Research Centres of Excellence (RCE) and 23 university-level research institutes and centres. It is also a partner in Singapore's fifth RCE. NUS shares a close affiliation with 16 national-level research institutes and centres. Research activities are strategic and robust, and NUS is well-known for its research strengths in engineering, life sciences and biomedicine, social sciences and natural sciences. It also strives to create a supportive and innovative environment to promote creative enterprise within its community.

For more information, please visit www.nus.edu.sg

About the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM)

Established in 1905, the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine was the first institution of higher learning in Singapore and the genesis of what would become the National University of Singapore. The School offers one of the finest undergraduate medical programs in the Asia Pacific region and commands international recognition and respect.

The latest university rankings from Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) have again rated the School as Asia's best for the third consecutive year. Globally, it is now ranked 20th, up one spot from its 2012 ranking.

The School admits 300 students to its medical undergraduate degree programme annually. The School strives to fulfil its tripartite mission of providing excellent clinical care, training the next generation of healthcare professionals, and fostering research that will transform the practice of medicine. It plays a pivotal role in producing future leaders in healthcare delivery, discovery and public service as well as in Singapore's Biomedical Sciences Initiative and Singapore Medicine, a medical tourism initiative.

The School's 16 departments in the basic sciences and clinical specialties work closely with the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies and the Centre for Biomedical Ethics to ensure that teaching and research are aligned and relevant to Singapore's healthcare needs.

For more information about the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, please visit <http://medicine.nus.edu.sg/corporate/>

About the Lien Foundation

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation.

In its mission to advance eldercare, the Foundation advocates better care of the dying. One of its flagship programmes, the Life Before Death initiative, was first conceived in 2006 to create greater public awareness about end-of-life issues in Singapore. It sought to de-stigmatise death and dying by spurring various 'dialogues' with the use of social media, art, films and photography and advocacy through research. Creative projects such as the Happy Coffins, the Last Outfit and the Obitcheery got people to confront their own mortality in unconventional ways.

The initiative has since gone beyond Singapore. In 2010, the Foundation commissioned the first-ever global Quality of Death index ranking 40 countries on their provision of end-of-life care. In 2013, the Foundation launched the inaugural international Design for Death competition that presented innovations in deathcare for the future.

www.lienfoundation.org