Conscientious objection in the healing professions: a readers' guide to the ethical and social issues

Jere D. Odell, MA, MLS (IU Center for Bioethics & IUPUI University Library); Amber Madison, JD, PhD candidate (Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health); Avril Rua, LLB, LLM, MA candidate (IU Center for Bioethics); Rahul Abhyankar, MS2 (IU School of Medicine) -- IUPUI, Indianapolis, Indiana

ABSTRACT

What is a health care provider to do when they find that their moral integrity is at odds with professional expectations? Should a nurse with religious objections to assisted reproduction be asked to stop working in obstetrics and gynecology? Can a pharmacist with moral objections to emergency contraception refer a patient to a colleague without being complicit in a perceived moral wrongdoing? Should religious organizations be required to provide or pay for objectionable health services? When is a patient's health and well-being more important than a professional's moral integrity?

Here we:
(1) describe a collaboration between a medical librarian and the Indiana University (IU) Conscience Project
(2) outline the subject of conscientious objection in the healing professions, and
(3) introduce a new readers' guide on the topic.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2001, a group of medical education professionals working on moral development, child psychiatry, and medical ethics established the IU Conscience Project. As part of the project, a website and digital library were created. An outcome of this work includes this guide to conscientious objection in the healing professions. From 2012-2013, with guidance from the IU Conscience Project and funding from the ALA Camille Whitney Award, a medical librarian and a team of medical ethics students developed an up-to-date, free guide to the ethical and social issues.

Deliverables:
- Short Overview
- Selective Bibliography: Guide to the Ethical and Social Issues
- Web-based Subject Guide
- Open Access Digital Library Collection

SCOPE & METHODS

Items selected for this subject guide and collection were limited to those addressing conscience-based refusals by health professionals (physicians, nurses, dentists, assistants, and students).

Resource types include: books, articles, reports, U.S. legislation, selected U.S. and state court cases, syllabi and websites.

Search Tools include: CINAHL, EthnicShare, Google, Google Scholar, Philosopher's Index, PubMed, Medline, Web of Science.

Suggested terms: conscientious objection, conscientious refusal, conscience clause, conscience laws, conscience-based refusal, refusal to treat, religious objection, values objection, moral integrity, physician autonomy, freedom of conscience.

1239 Records retrieved [March 13, 2013]

TOPICS

- Abortion
- Attitudes
- Prescriptions
- End of Life
- Organizations
- AIDS
- Vaccinations
- Fertility

PROFESSIONALS

Professionals from all areas of health and healing, including physician assistants, therapists and students, may express concerns about conflicts between values and duties. Commonly addressed professional roles include:

- Physicians
- Psychiatrists
- Midwives
- Dentists
- Nurses
- Students
- Reproductive Health
- Pharmacists
- Doctors
- Staff

ATTITUDES

What do professionals think?

- 86% (981/1122) of physicians favor a duty to provide information about all options (Curlin, et al. 2007)
- 71% (820/1128) of physicians believe objecting professionals have a duty to refer patients to willing providers (Curlin, et al. 2007)
- 57% (84/147) of physicians reported participating in care they found to be morally objectionable (Frank 2011)
- 55% (328/597) of Catholic Hospital Emergency Rooms would "never provide Emergency Contraception" (Nunn, et al. 2003)
- 23% (170/730) of medical students (London, England) reported they would not perform "Abortion for failed contraception before 24 weeks" (Stockland 2012)

VACCINATIONS & PANDEMICS

Objections

Refusal to administer vaccinations; refusal by health professionals to receive vaccinations; refusal to see patients who have not been vaccinated; refusal treat patients during pandemics; refusal to treat HIV-positive patients.

Selected Readings

REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE

Objections

Refusal to participate in services or preparation of instruments for abortions; refusal to prescribe or fill in prescriptions for contraception, including emergency contraception; refusal to assist persons in same sex relationships with reproductive technologies and fertility treatments; refusal to refer a patient to a willing provider, or provide information relating to available options.

Selected Readings

END OF LIFE

Objections

Refusal by physicians or nurses to provide care; refusal to withhold or withdraw care; refusal to adhere to advance directive; refusal to comply with patients requests.

Selected Readings

SELECTED READINGS


http://bioethics.iu.edu/conscientious-objection