

# Medical Ethics



## Subject 4

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# Medical ethics theories

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## Components of Medical Ethics

- The Physician ( Doctor) - Patient Relationship
- The Physician - Physician Relationship
- The relationship of the Physician to the System of Healthcare
- The Relationship of the Physician to Society

# Medical ethics theories

- ✚ Ethical theories and principles bring significant characteristics to the decision-making process.
- ✚ Although all the ethical theories attempt to follow the ethical principles ,these ethical theories can be used in combination to obtain the most ethically correct action.
- ✚ There are three major medical ethics theories

# 1. Teleological theories :



- It concerns about the consequences of actions as the first step in analyzing moral activity.
- **Consequentialism** is another name given to this type of theories.
- Teleology comes from the Greek for **goal** (*telos* ) and **theory** (*logos*).
- Individuals must **choose the action or those actions that provide the best outcome.**

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## WHAT IS UTILITARIANISM?

- This is known as act **utilitarianism**.
- An alternative approach is ruling utilitarianism in which the **action chosen to provide the best outcome**.
- Individual makes a **choice for the best and for the least amount of harm**.
- An act is **good if it results in the greatest benefit for the most people**





Utilitarianism is most often classed as a consequentialist theory **because it proposes that in conflicts**, it is ethical to **choose the act to maximize the good, and minimize the harm**:

“The **greatest good for the greatest number**,” is the primary ethical principle of this theory.



## *Strengths*

The strengths of utilitarian and consequentialist theory in general are that:

- It aims to **measure outcomes**.
- It also most often helps **resolve conflicts** between individual and public duties of professionals.
- utilitarianism is almost a **required theory of industrialized and technological societies** ,as well as political activity itself.

## *Weakness*

Teleological theory has been criticized often for the fact that:

- ✚ one cannot predict the outcome of actions in advance.
- ✚ Usefulness to society is not a good criterion for moral honesty, because **what society finds desirable may often turn out to be evil.**

For example , many programs to sterilize the retarded people, to prevent the transmission of hereditary diseases with mental retardation,



## 2. Deontology

- Deontological theory underlines the importance of one's duties and obligations.
- *Deon* is a Greek word for duty.
- One has the duty or obligation to do the right thing, regardless of outcome.
- Some principles are intrinsically right regardless of resulting consequences.
- An act is moral if it could become a universal rule for society.

## *Strengths*

- help justify one's personal actions and try to convince everyone, including oneself, that they are right.
- Professional ethics originates with this conception of duty and obligation arising from the moral center of the profession itself, and not from public expectations
- the act of the person should always conform to the golden rule: Act always as if what you do would become a universal law.

## *Weaknesses*

- ✚ Deontology cannot within itself **provide for resolution of conflicts** among two or more moral persons who profoundly disagree.
- ✚ By contrast the deontologist has a **duty to tell the truth**; even if it may be delayed for a time, the intent must be truth telling.
- ✚ One could **never justify lying to the patient for any reason**.

### 3. Virtue Theories

- The key difference between consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics is that the virtue emphasizes the moral character, or virtues of the individual.
- The virtues are habits formed by:
  - one's personality ,
  - parental and social training, and
  - professional or other standards suitable to one's life choices and roles in society.
- Virtue ethics has emerged due to the perceived deficits in ethical theories such as consequentialism and deontology for healthcare.

The virtues are **embedded character traits** which are held to be societally valuable such as:

1. truth-telling,
2. honesty and
3. kindness.



Virtue ethics is about **an individual of good character doing the right thing.**

**Examples** in healthcare are seen in **codes of conduct and guidance** developed by professional regulators rely on their **moral character into their practice .**

# Honesty

1. Being truthful to others.
2. Being truthful to yourself.
3. Doing what is **right regardless who is around.**
4. Being someone other can trust.



## **Strengths**

- Virtue theory shares with deontological theory the emphasis on the moral agent.
- It shares with teleological theory an analysis of the goodness of actions too.
- Virtue theory thus can combine the strengths of both of the other theories.
- formed opinions about international rights, the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.

## **Weaknesses**

Is simplistic; does not provide sufficiently clear action guides; is too private, too prone to individual definitions.

*Thank You*