MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Sitting at the dinner table, my 13-year old son asked, “if you could live forever, would you want to?” My 10-year old quickly answered “well, yeah, duh,” but my 16 year-old wasn’t so sure: “It depends on whether I would be healthy when I was 120. And if my friends and family would also live forever.” As we debated the pros and cons of an eternal life on earth and specified the conditions under which we would want to live and die, my oldest son suddenly stood up and declared, “this is morbid. I don’t want to talk about it anymore.” It is true. Nobody likes to think about getting sick, dying, or losing their loved ones. But it is the one certainty in life. We will all die, and most of us will experience illness at some point in our lives.

As a bioethicist who teaches about end of life decision making I do actually talk about this topic; quite a bit it turns out. I teach students and physicians about the importance of advance care planning, living wills, and how to determine who the “appropriate” surrogate decision maker is for incapacitated patients. I explain that, when conflict arises, it is important to focus on goals of care and to try to elucidate the patient’s values. And yet, it isn’t always that simple. If I asked you, right now, what your core values are, could you tell me? Would your family members be able to tell me? Would they know what it means to make decisions consistent with those values?

I know that I am living my life most authentically when I am connecting with others, when I am doing those things that I am passionate about, and when I am able to exercise the freedom to choose my attitude and to find meaning in this journey we are all on together. When I think about what a good death means to me, it embodies these core values. I will be surrounded by my family and my closest friends, connecting, loving, and sharing in the experience. I will reflect back on my life and know that I lived it to the fullest. And I will have time to reflect on the meaning of it all, without judgement and without fear. I will die with grace, surrounded by love. It will be intimate and vulnerable and totally authentic. That is how I want to die. Because that is how I want to live.

“What you are will show, ultimately. Start now, every day, becoming, in your actions, your regular actions, what you would like to become in the bigger scheme of things.”

--Anna Deavere Smith

UPCOMING EVENTS

Grand Rounds: Dec. 14
Journal Club: Jan. 5
Community Outreach Event: Jan. 17
DIVA U Speaker Series: March 9

On Jan. 17, 2017 our Center is hosting renowned actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, in a performance of her one-woman play, Let Me Down Easy. Anna Deavere Smith will push us all to reflect on our own core values. Using verbatim theatre, she will show us the vulnerability of the human body and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of illness and even death. Join us for an engaging performance, and stick around for a facilitated dinner discussion, where I invite you all to participate in the conversation that my son started at our own dinner table with this simple question: If you could live forever, would you want to?
EDUCATION

Ethics Track Students at ASBH

Congratulations to Julika Kaplan and Stephanie Allen, the two Ethics Track students who were selected to attend the 18th annual American Society of Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH) Conference in Washington, DC. Thank you for your support of the Laurence McCullough Travel Award to make this experience possible.

Attending this conference enabled the ethical frameworks and discourse I was taught in the first and second year bioethics courses to come to life. This enabled me to truly begin to view myself as a future physician involved in clinical and public health ethics.

ASBH exposed me to specific projects and researchers within my fields of interest, and these experiences will be relevant to the rest of my career!

- Ethics Track Students

The Ethics Track continues to soar as we are reaching many more BCM medical students. We have our highest enrollment with 54 students participating in the second year course!

ETHICS, PROFESSIONALISM, AND POLICY PROGRAM (EP3) UPDATE

EP3 is a comprehensive curriculum in Ethics, Professionalism, and Health Policy integrated across residencies at the graduate medical education (GME) level at BCM. So far, we are deployed in nearly two-thirds of our residency programs. EP3 is unique in that its curriculum is mapped to meet GME competencies in ethics, professionalism, and health policy as required by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. Moreover, EP3 utilizes a flipped classroom model to teach foundational concepts through video modules followed by in-person engagement sessions where residents delve deeper into these concepts through case-based exercises and moderated discussions.

Article Featuring EP3
Residency Program Alert interviewed program coordinator John Antonio about EP3 and the article is on our website for download.

NARRATIVE MEDICINE PROGRAM

Read Dr. Ricardo Nuila’s piece titled Poor and Uninsured in Texas that recently appeared in The New Yorker.

EVENT DETAILS

Journal Club: Monthly, brown-bag lunch, open-forums available to anyone interested in attending. Subscribe to our email distribution list to learn more.

Grand Rounds: Monthly events held at Houston Methodist Hospital (5-6p.m., Rio Grande Room) for their healthcare professionals, but are open to anyone interested in attending.

IN THE NEWS

Check out the latest hot topics in medical ethics and health policy capturing national public attention.
Healthcare Policy & Management Track Update

The Health Policy Program has kicked off an ambitious new curriculum for medical students, starting with a core course, Introduction to Policy and Management. This is part of a four-course track designed for BCM students interested in policy often overlooked in a typical medical education. Next year, we will add a second seminar based course on a wide array of compelling topics, including drug development, emerging medical technologies, medical tourism, neuroethics, and public health.

New Blog: PolicyWise

We are happy to announce the launch of PolicyWise, a new blog dedicated to creating a national spotlight for health policy opinion and research. This blog will help us achieve our vision to create an intellectual environment where policy stakeholders can critically reflect on and respond to challenges in healthcare and biomedical research. Our faculty will blog on issues as diverse as gene editing and Zika.

Meet Our Health Policy Scholars

The Health Policy Program is excited to extend our disciplinary reach with the appointment of 15 new Health Policy Scholars. This talented group teach in our courses, collaborate on our research projects, and work with us to build new programs.

Health Policy Speaker Series

On Oct. 25th, the Health Policy Program kicked off our speaker series with Dr. Greg Stock. Dr. Stock, an authority on the genomic and biotech revolution, spoke on the next generation of healthcare and the way newly emerging technologies will enhance the practice and delivery of medicine. The focus on disruptive technologies drew an audience from around the Texas Medical Center, including faculty, medical professionals, community members, postdocs, and students from medicine and the biomedical sciences.
Center Fellow Graduation

Farewell to the Center’s clinical ethics fellow Ashley Stephens, MA who will be joining Seton Healthcare Family, a member of Ascension Health, in Austin, TX as their new Clinical Ethicist. Ashley will be working closely with the Director of Ethics Integration and the ethics committees to train volunteer-consultants to expand the ethics consultation program and education throughout Seton’s 11 hospitals. Click here to learn more about this program.

Clinical Ethics Scholarship

The clinical ethics team provides guidance to new ethics consultants or experienced clinical ethicists who wish to augment their proficiencies. Click here to learn more about their publications and presentations.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING A CLINICAL ETHICS CONSULTATION SERVICE

The American Journal of Bioethics “highly recommend the Guide for both consultants and those who train them” and said “for many ethics committees and consultation services, this resource will be no less than a godsend.” The guide was described as a “welcome addition to our clinical ethics repertoire due to its practicality, its ease of use, and its demonstration of how the Core Competencies can be put into practice.” Buy your copy today!

INTENSIVE BIOETHICS COURSE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

In partnership with Houston Methodist Hospital, the Center is pleased to offer the 3rd annual Intensive Bioethics Course taking place April 18-21, 2017. This practical course promises to be a productive and engaging week that covers fundamental bioethics topics and advanced clinical ethics skills. The course is geared towards individuals who encounter complex ethical challenges in the healthcare setting and wish to receive further training covering the following objectives:

- Identify ethical challenges arising in patient care
- Develop ethically reasoned and practical strategies for addressing these ethical challenges
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies in particular cases
- Formulate interdisciplinary plans for appropriately managing these ethical challenges

What Previous Students are Saying:

“Information was comprehensive and exactly what I needed”

“The breadth, expertise of speakers, energy of delivery, and attention to the needs and hopes of participants resulted in an outstanding conference”

100% of surveyed participants said they will change their practice as a direct result of the course

Registration is now open. Come take advantage of the early bird discount!
Select Presentations


Select Publications


Center Research at ASBH

The Center is proud to have had 17 abstracts accepted for the 18th annual ASBH Conference in Washington, DC where faculty, fellows, and staff presented their diverse research. Topics ranged from managing student mistreatment in medical school, the legal landscape of genomic patents, tobacco regulation policies, pursuing a career in bioethics, and evaluation tools for leading family meetings. Check out more of the Center’s expansive research here.
COMMUNITY

The Center values creating a meaningful connection between the work we do and the people whose lives are impacted by these important ethical questions. We are committed to building relationships with the community and starting a dialogue around these very issues.

Register for the Decisions, Issues, and Values Affecting U (DIVA U) Speaker Series

Through thought provoking lectures and discussions, U are invited to explore your own decisions, issues, and values in the context of the current complex medical ethics and health policy landscape. During each lunchtime session, a Center faculty member will present a relevant medical ethics dilemma. Register today!

Tickets on Sale Now - Outreach Event January 17, 2017

The Center is thrilled to welcome playwright, TV star and stage actress Anna Deavere Smith for the Houston premiere of her theatrical hit, Let Me Down Easy. The docudrama examines the body as it relates to health and human existence in verbatim excerpts from real-life interviews, where Smith builds a kaleidoscopic one-act play full of heart, humor and heroism.

Tickets are going fast, hurry and get yours today!

Tickets for the performance and dinner are available now through our website here.

Individual tickets for the performance only can be purchased through HoustonFirst here.

Click here for more information regarding the event and opportunites for sponsorship.

The University of Houston Honors College
Memorial Hermann
Institute for Martin Preferred Foods Spirituality and Health
Texas Medical Center

UT Health and The McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics
Tactical Associates – Merrill Lynch Private Banking and Investment Group
Texas Children’s Hospital HCA Gulf Coast Division The Final Acts Project

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MD ANDERSON CANCER CENTER

This outreach event is possible through the generous support of our sponsors.
Awards and Recognition

Center faculty member Christi Guerinni was awarded a Research Scientist Development Award (K01) from the National Human Genome Research Institute to support the study of ownership interests in genomic citizen science initiatives. Totaling more than $600,000 over four years, the grant will support training and research in ethics, genomics, qualitative research, and conjoint analysis. She also received the Julius and Suzan Glickman Endowed Scholarship in Innovation for the 2016-17 academic year at U.T. School of Public Health.

Center research associate Angela Villanueva received the “New Presenter Award” from the American Public Health Association Genomics Forum.

Secondary Faculty member Joseph Kass has been named the new Associate Dean for Student Affairs for the School of Medicine.

Secondary Faculty member Ernest Frugé was invited to do a workshop at the International Society for Pediatric Oncology Congress to focus on ethical dilemmas and moral distress in global programs.

Adjunct Faculty member Jim Jones received the Presidential Citation Award from the Society for Vascular Surgery for 15 years of clinical ethics papers that he and Laurence McCullough contributed.

Congratulations all!

BLOGS ON BIOETHICS.NET
Read Dr. Blumenthal-Barby’s recent blog posts on Bioethics.net.

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DONATE
The Center for Medical Ethics and Health Policy researches and influences policy on today’s most pressing ethical issues, like what do about the Zika virus, stem cell therapies that can make you live longer, face transplants, the rights of Alzheimer’s patients, end of life decision making, and genetically designing babies. We are one of the biggest and fastest growing ethics centers in the country, and our goal is to build the infrastructure so that we can respond immediately to issues like these and help government and health care providers decide how to do the right thing. In order to accomplish this, we need your help. Please consider donating to the Center. Click here to learn more or contact us.