2019 Kinsman Bioethics Conference

Raising Voices:
The Ethics of Dialogue and Communication in Health Care

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**SESSION E4 OBJECTIVES**

- Define and discuss non-religious belief systems.
- Reflect on the influence of our own beliefs in healthcare ethics consults.
- Explore strategies for effectively recognizing and engaging a patient or family member’s non-religious beliefs which inform their decision making.

**SESSION E4 SPEAKER**

Micki Varner, M.Div., B.C.C.

Micki Varner is the Manager of Spiritual Care for PeaceHealth’s Oregon Network. She is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. She received her BA in History and MA in Technical & Scientific Communication from James Madison University and her MDiv from Episcopal Divinity School. Micki’s curiosity about the ways people find and express meaning in community through story and ritual informs her practice of ministry and her approach to healthcare ethics consultation.
Listening for Non-Religious Belief Systems in Healthcare Ethics Consultation

The Rev. Micki Varner, MA, MDiv, BCC
Manager of Spiritual Care
PeaceHealth Oregon Network

Objectives

- Define and discuss non-religious belief systems.
- Reflect on the influence of our own beliefs in healthcare ethics consults.
- Explore strategies for effectively recognizing and engaging a patient or family member’s non-religious beliefs which inform their decision making.
Balcerowicz’ Four Components of Religion

- Doctrine
- Religious practice (cult)
- Community
- Irrationality


Irrationality

- Incomplete responsibility (believers entrust responsibility for their fate to God)
- Unquestionability of norms (norms derived from religion can’t be questioned)
- Uncriticality (critical thinking not applied to beliefs)
- Essential unknowability (conscious desire on the part of the believer to limit their knowledge of the world)
Balcerowicz concludes…

- Non-religious belief systems are those which can be modified by logic while religious belief systems are those which are not only unmodifiable but also defy logic.

- Non-religious belief system = math or science

What Is Spirituality?

Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, and to the significant or sacred.

Consensus Conference to Improve the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care, February 2009
Working definition of non-religious belief systems

- Core belief derived from a significant life experience
- Limited to the individual or a family/friend group
- Irrationality
  - Uncriticality (critical thinking not applied to core belief)
  - Essential unknowability (facts do not impact the truth this belief)

Knowable facts versus a belief system
Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences

- Visual-Spatial Intelligence
- Linguistic-Verbal Intelligence
- Logical-Mathematical Intelligence
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
- Musical Intelligence
- Interpersonal Intelligence
- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Naturalistic Intelligence

What beliefs/biases am I bringing with me?
Strategies for working with non-religious beliefs

- Core belief derived from significant life experience
- Individual or small group of believers
- Irrationality
  - Uncriticality
  - Essential unknowability
- Listen to the person’s experience, asking questions about meaning, identity, and life purpose
- Accept and respect that this belief is uniquely important to the person.
- These are not rational beliefs, rather these are emotional beliefs.

Skills for working with non-religious beliefs

- Listen to personal experience
- Accept and respect the unique importance of this belief
- Emotionally significant
- Open-ended questions about meaning, purpose, identity.
- Communicate your acceptance and respect through words and actions
- Listen for and respond to the emotional significance of this belief. Address emotions for what they are without responding to emotions with facts.
Case Studies