

## “Fundamental Moral Values, Cultural Diversity and Ethics Regulation within the Health Professions”



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## WHAT ARE VALUES?

- At the personal level, a value is a belief about the worth or importance of anything – material object, idea, behaviour, institution, system, etc.
- At the societal level, values are what any identifiable community of human beings cherishes, supports, promotes, protects, etc., and invests in emotionally, sentimentally, etc.
- The values of the various human communities, societies and cultures of the world are in some ways similar but also different according to their worldview, their adaptation to the environment in which they live, their historical experiences, and the daily existential problems and pressures that impinge on them
- Human values are therefore partly universal and partly relative and particularistic

[Tangwa, GB (2004). Between Universalism and Relativism: A Conceptual Exploration of Problems in Formulating and Applying International Biomedical Ethical Guidelines”. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 30 (pp. 63-67), 2004.]

## MEDICINE, HEALTHCARE AND CULTURES

- Within all cultures, medicine/healthcare are important professions.
- Professionalism is always marked by shared values, objectives, and some means of regulating and controlling conduct and behaviour.
- In traditional societies such control is achieved through customs, ritual injunctions and taboos and in modern societies by written declarations, proclamations, codes, oaths, guidelines, directives, etc.



## MEDICINE HAS MADE GREAT PROGRESS

- One of the most remarkable achievements of the last century
- From culture based art into global science
- Victory over many formidable diseases and epidemics
- Significant improvement in human health and longevity
- Thanks to the scientific spirit and scientific research
- Thanks to technology
- Thanks to commerce and industry



## COUNTER-BALANCE TO MEDICAL PROGRESS

- Medical malpractices
- Uneven global distribution of “the global medical cake”
- Inverse distribution of the global burden of disease
- The rise and spread of even deadlier diseases and epidemics
- Negative role of monopoly commerce, big business and the profit motive
- Breakdown of traditional health systems




## MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

- Nazi War Crimes in Germany: *Nuremberg Code (1947)* and *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*, *Declaration of Helsinki (1964)*
- Crimes in the USA – Tuskegee, Willowbrook, Detroit, Guatemala, etc. - : the *Belmont Report (1979)* / *The Common Rule (1991)*
- Contemporary crimes: ?
- Medical progress has been partly helped by abuses, malpractices and crimes against human beings
- Need this be the case?
- Is medical knowledge unqualifiedly good?



## WHY ETHICS REGULATION IS IMPORTANT

- Lessons from history 
- Increasing wedlock between medicine and commerce
- Biomedical research has become big business 
- Wherever big business driven by the profit motive, power and influence are at play, ethics, justice and fair play are likely to be swept under the carpet
- Regulation and legislation are some of the allies and road companions of morally correct actions and behaviours

## IS GLOBAL ETHICS REGULATION APPROPRIATE?

- Despite cultural diversities, differing worldviews and perspectives, different existential conditions,
- Global ethics regulation is appropriate and advisable
- Because the fundamental moral values it seeks to uphold and protect have cross-cultural relevance and validity
- For example, the four values implied in Western so-called 'principlism' – autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice
- In spite of being inevitably shaped and coloured by cultural, contextual and situational realities

## PROVIDED

In formulating such principles:

- Different cultural, contextual and situational perspectives are considered and taken into account
- Cultural particulars are not confused with universals
- Human self-interest, ego-centrism, ethnocentrism are avoided
- An effort is made to listen to others with sympathetic understanding
- It is realized and constantly affirmed that "MIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT"

## IS GLOBAL ETHICS REGULATION POSSIBLE?

Obviously yes, from existing international regulations and guidelines, such as:

- *The Nuremberg Code*
- *The Declaration of Helsinki*
- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- *ICOH Code of Ethics*



## IS GLOBAL ETHICS REGULATION APPROPRIATE? ..

There's no human community, society or culture anywhere on earth that:

1. Condone or encourage doing harm/evil or wrong generally
2. Does not appreciate and encourage doing good/right, helping the needy, being honest, reliable and trustworthy
3. Does not perceive, affirm or legislate moral equality between kindred
4. Does not require or concede treating equals with fairness and equity

These principles and others like them overarch all human societies and cultures as imperatives for harmonious living together

## CONCLUSION

- Ethics regulation within the health professions is an inescapable moral imperative today because,
- In spite of remarkable cultural diversity, the world is characterized by the phenomenon of globalization



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