



Ethics Presentation

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Objectives

- + Identify ethical dilemmas in clinical practice
- + Discuss a framework for considering the issues raised
- + Base conclusions on ethically sound principles

Scenario 1- Family relationships

- + Michelle 23 yr old woman
- + Diagnosed with SLE from age 15 yrs
- + Mother often calls/emails GP to discuss Michelle's symptoms-
Mother and GP are friends from school
- + Most recently mother has expressed that she was not happy with Michelle's rheumatologist, Dr. Clarke
- + Mother asks GP to convince daughter to get a second opinion

Questions to consider

- + Should GP engage mother in conversation?
- + If not-why? Mother is aware of details of Michelle's hx. and intimately involved in her care.
- + If yes, how much/what information should be disclosed?
- + To what degree should GP and mother respect Michelle's choice of doctor?
- + What role should Dr. play in this relationship?
- + What about the frequent calls/emails?

Focus on key ethical principles:

1. Autonomy

- + Autonomy: right to make decisions, inc. how much they wish to share decisions and process used (confidentiality)
- + If Dr. knows Michelle does not want mother involved then need to deflect mother- if not can continue
- + Respect for autonomy inc. assisting with informed decision

2. Beneficence

- + Mother has legitimate interest in Michelle's wellbeing- views are not determinative but deserve some consideration
- + Are mother's views clinically important or preference
- + Dr. may need to speak with rheumatologist
- + Assist Michelle and mother understand each other's views

3. Trust in doctor-patient relationship

- + Aim for balance in your relationship with patient and family
- + Assist pt. with discussing any concerns she may have about her care
- + If you have reservations recommend perusing a second opinion
- + Ultimately: best quality care consistent with pt.'s goals

Scenario 2- Medical errors

- + Mrs. Smith accompanied her husband to see his general practitioner for management of Diabetes- their son is present during the consultation
- + Son reports that his mother was recently diagnosed with DM and he would like the GP to manage her condition
- + GP decides to see Mrs. Smith right after completing his assessment of Mr. Smith

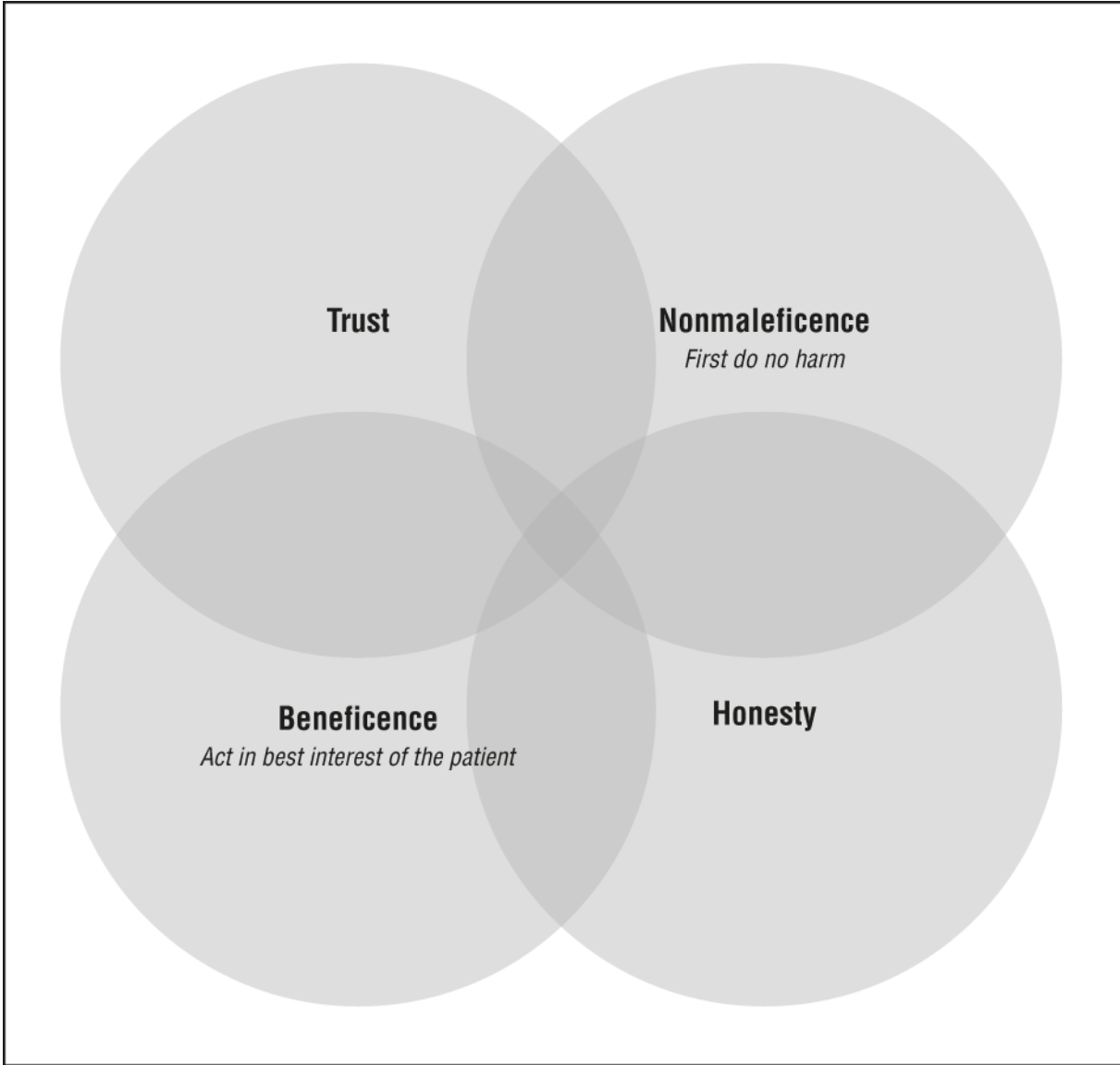
- + Three weeks later during a social event Mrs. Smith comments to doctor that she had been experiencing very low blood sugars since the last visit
- + The doctor returns to his office and realises that he has mixed up the medication prescription for Mrs. Smith- he has prescribed Mr. Smith's medication
- + GP corrects his mistake and sugars normalise with no further issue for Mrs. Smith

Questions to consider

- + Should GP disclose his mistake?
- + If so with how much detail?
- + What if patient/family are angry and sues/reports to Medical Council?
- + Would this lead to a lack of respect by colleagues?
- + Does disclosure erode public trust in physicians?

Ethics of disclosure

- + Seriously harmful errors must be disclosed
- + Physicians less likely to disclose minimally harmful errors – able to justify avoiding disclosure
- + Pt. autonomy most important – do not presuppose what person wants to know
- + Pt.'s perspective – harm viewed in terms of discomfort, anxiety, erosion of trust in pt./dr. relationship



Recommendations on disclosure

Patients are less likely to sue if:

- + Error is disclosed immediately- do not wait to see if error discovered
- + An apology is offered
- + Steps being taken to ensure not repeated
- + Compensation offered to cover costs

Even if sued usually not sustainable if error induced no harm

Conclusion

- + Consider what the ethical questions pertinent to the case
- + Consider the case from the perspective of those involved-
patient, family, physician
- + Consider the key ethical principles – autonomy, beneficence,
trust in patient/doctor relationship



THANK YOU