

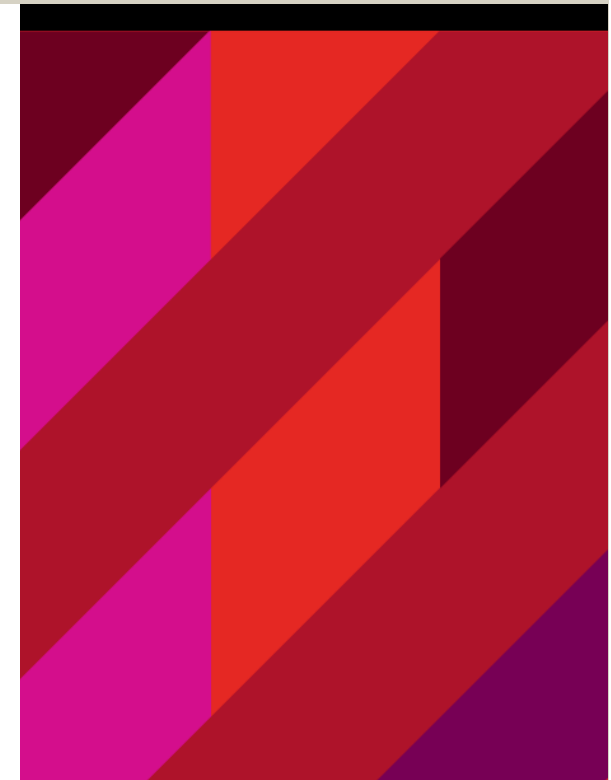
Ethics and decision making in healthcare

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23 August 2018



My interests

I am an academic bioethicist with an interest in overdiagnosis, including breast cancer overdiagnosis. In my position I am expected to publish research with impact and to contribute to policy debates.

I have received funding from the Australian Research Council in the form of a Future Fellowship (FT130100346) on Defining disease and the ethics of overdiagnosis. This Fellowship has funded my attendance at this workshop.

Outline

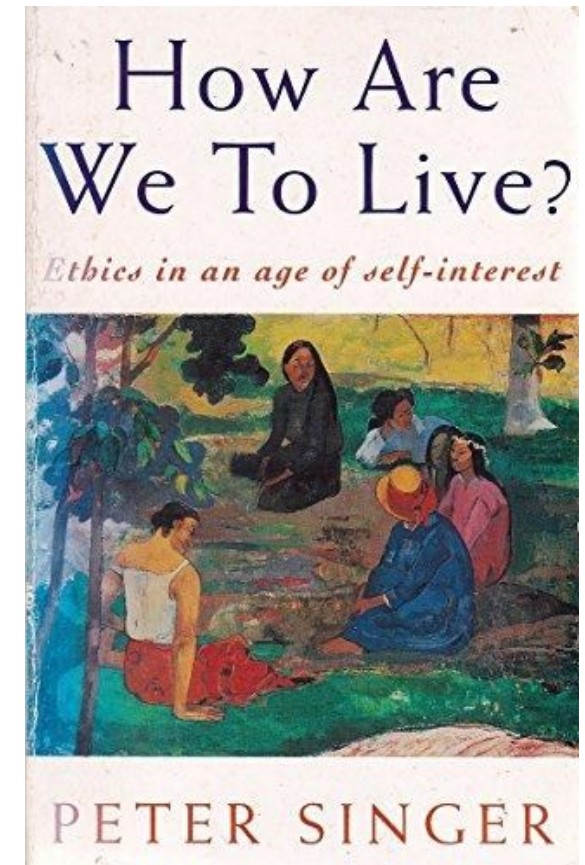
1. Introduction: ethics and healthcare
2. Theoretical and practical ethics
3. Doing ethics (1)
4. Individual and public considerations
5. Doing ethics (2)



What is ethics?

Ethics involves thinking about values, actions and character:

- How should we treat others?
- What is the right thing to do?
- What values are important in this situation?
- What would a morally admirable person do?





Healthcare: science *and* values

Science uses evidence to tell us what the options are and if they are effective.

But scientific evidence can't tell us what the right thing to do is.

For that we need value judgments and ethical reasoning.



Healthcare: responsibilities of policy makers and professionals

Providing healthcare involves:

- Specialised knowledge
- Privileged access to resources
- Stewardship of resources
- Power dynamics
- Conflicts of interest

As a result, healthcare providers have particular responsibilities.



What is the right thing to do?

Foundations of ethics: 2 very influential moral theories

1. Consequences

1. Duties and obligations



Consequentialist theories



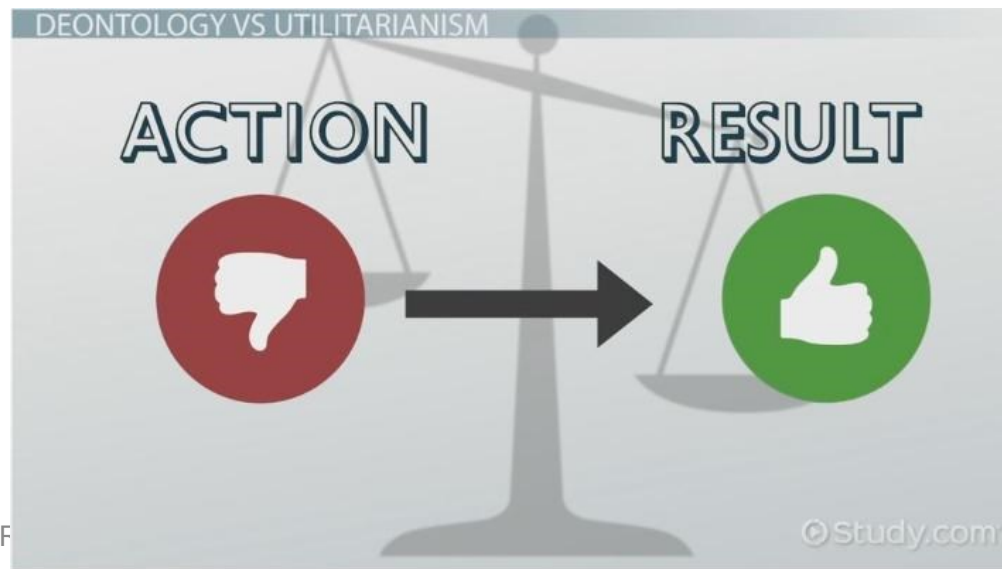
An action is right if it produces the best consequences and wrong if it does not.

Utilitarianism: The right action is the one that (out of all the options) leads to the maximum sum of happiness

“The greatest good for the greatest number”

Deontology: duties and obligations

The nature of the act is morally important: Some acts are wrong in themselves and should not be performed, even if doing so would produce good consequences.





Practical ethics: values and principles

Beneficence: acting in the patient's best interests

- Duty of care
- Avoiding harm
- Futility
- Paternalism

Justice and equity

- Health equity
- Healthcare access
- Resource allocation
- Global justice
- Exploitation

Respecting patient autonomy

- Consent
- Confidentiality
- Competence
- Truth telling
- Respect
- Rights
- Dignity
- Trustworthiness

Ethical decision making in the clinic

Patient centred

- a) What are the patient's values?
- b) What are the patient's health needs?
- c) How can the patient be supported to make the best decision for them?
- d) Have all the potential consequences been considered?
- e) What are the healthcare provider's duties and obligations?



Decision

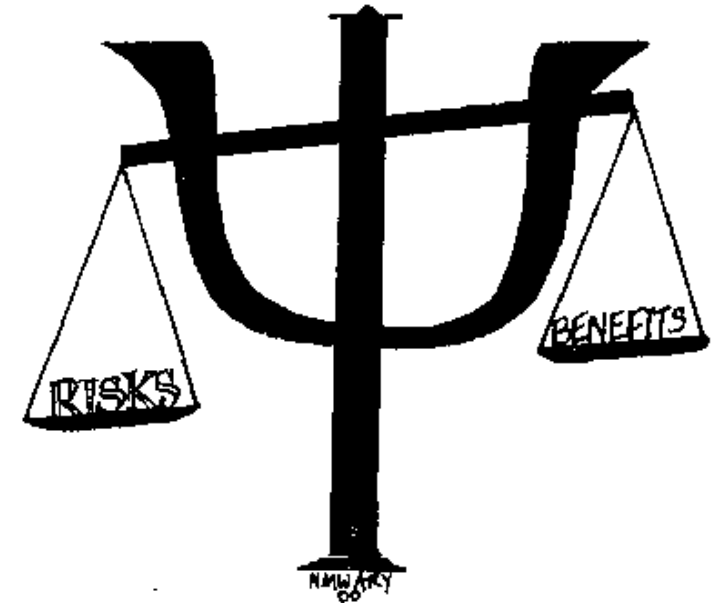
Patients and populations

How should we take account of the interests of individual patients and respect their autonomy in the context of a population screening program?

“The greatest good for the greatest number”

Expected utility:

- Achieving the ‘best’ balance of harms and benefits
- Equity
- Efficiency
- Cost-effectiveness



Ethical considerations for populations



- a) What values are at stake?
 - What counts as harms, benefit?
- b) What are the relevant facts?
 - Evidence of efficacy, effectiveness
 - Evidence about harms and benefits
- c) What are the costs and opportunity costs?
- d) Is access to the the program equitable?
- e) Is there fair distribution of benefits and harms?
- f) Are there conflicts of interest?
- g) Is the proposed intervention proportionate to the medical need?



**HOW CAN WE MAKE
ETHICALLY JUSTIFIED
DECISIONS AT THE
POPULATION LEVEL?**

Procedural issues

To make an ethically justifiable decision requires:

- Accuracy of information: Identifying points of agreement and disagreement regarding “the facts of the matter”
- Engaging with all stakeholders to understand and take account of multiple perspectives and the values at stake
- Using a fair process: identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest and other sources of bias
- Being transparent during the decision-making process
- Having some kind of review or appeal process



Conclusion

