Innovative, Pioneering, and Powered by Philanthropy

Growth happens, but without wise guidance and innovation it can grow into something large, lumpy, and immobile. The Program in Medicine & Human Values (PMHV) has seen tremendous growth and success in the past 18 months. The Program is now providing ethics consultation support and assistance to three additional Sutter hospitals: Eden Medical Center, Sutter Delta Medical Center, and Mills Peninsula Medical Center. The program now serves a total of seven Bay Area hospitals. In addition, two more clinical bioethicists have recently joined our staff to accommodate growth, and 2017 will show at least 30 percent growth in patient care consultations.

Most importantly, we are making a difference in providing high-quality care to patients. Physicians at Sutter Health hospitals are extremely appreciative of the expertise our bioethicists provide to improve patient care in difficult and complex medical situations. Our bioethicists are applauded for their communication skills, and particularly for their ability to discuss meaningful issues—such as preferences for medical treatment—with patients whose mental clarity is often compromised by their illness. A better understanding of each patient’s goals and values adds a positive, nuanced and patient-centered approach to each case.

Sutter Health leadership has taken notice. PMHV’s ethics team has been instrumental in developing hospital policies that are currently being standardized across our affiliates. Quality measures that help improve patient care and address issues of staff burnout and morale are the result of PMHV innovation.

PMHV is recognized for our efforts to bring essential skills and resources to patient care. Sutter Health has invested in our ethics consultation service, allowing us to provide consultations at no cost. The availability of professional ethics consultation is now considered an indispensable component of quality medical care at all Sutter Health hospitals in the Bay Area.

Your philanthropic support has allowed us to launch this unique clinical service that did not exist a few years ago. Ultimately we have secured institutional support. There were few pre-existing models for comprehensive bioethics services, and today we serve as a national model for providing ethically appropriate care.

There are new challenges ahead. Our team is engaged with a number of new projects in bioethics. Our Neuroethics program team continues to work closely with neurologists and other clinicians at Sutter to explore the interface between our current understanding of human potential and the rapidly developing advances in brain science. Our educational programs for the medical community are robust and expanding in new directions daily. With philanthropic support, we also have the opportunity to move our ethics program out of the inpatient hospital setting and into the growing outpatient world.

These are exciting times in health care. We must continue to push the boundaries of ethical challenges pertaining to new diseases and technologies. This is where you come in. Your financial support is the foundation of our energy and vitality as we expand our unique program. We are asking for your support so we can move our pioneering projects forward and thus address the bioethical challenges of the future. I invite you to become a part of this venture by directing some of your year-end giving to the Program in Medicine & Human Values.

Thank you,

William S. Andereck, M.D., FACP
Helping Build Trust Through Effective Communication

The Program in Medicine & Human Values’ professional ethics service has grown to cover additional hospitals and service areas in the past year. This has led to increased visibility for the service and recognition of value that goes beyond providing ethics consultations. Clinicians from Sutter Health and other health systems have expressed to us how they benefit from the expert communication skills of the professional bioethicists. The ethics team is able to utilize these key skills in clinical care. In addition, the team is teaching providers how to apply these skills to their own practice. Communication skills are essential in addressing challenging patient situations, building consensus with team members, resolving conflicts, and building trust and rapport. They lead to better patient care and promote a culture of professionalism and satisfaction. PMHV also conducted a day long workshop focusing on communication skills in the clinical setting. As 2017 comes to a close, we bring you snapshots of what physicians and other clinical staff from across Sutter Health and beyond have to say about the impact of PMHV’s ethics service in the area of communication.

Stephanie Hsiao, M.D.
Medicine Chief Resident, CPMC

“When I was a senior resident on the cardiology critical care service during my third year of Internal Medicine Residency training, I had a very difficult and tragic case involving a complex goals-of-care discussion. The patient suffered a significant and irreversible anoxic brain injury, and remained comatose and ventilator dependent. He had a beautiful family with a loving wife and a very young child. Multiple attending physicians (cardiology, neurology, and critical care) told the family about the poor prognosis and the high likelihood of the patient not surviving the hospitalization. Family, however, continued to be very hopeful and frequently interpreted the patient’s involuntary myoclonic jerks as a sign of waking-up. The team requested an ethics consultation. I worked closely with the bioethicist and we would debrief prior to and after each family meeting. The bioethicist guided me on how to approach each family meeting and provided me with suggestions about specific word choices related to the patient’s progress/prognosis so that the information discussed at these meetings was clear and not misleading. These debriefing sessions with the bioethicist on how to communicate were incredibly valuable. They helped frame each family meeting with clarity, honesty, and compassion. The sessions also helped me build confidence navigating these complex goals-of-care discussions. Due to the bioethicist’s help, we were able to maintain and strengthen a trusting relationship between the medical team and the grieving family while helping everyone make the difficult decision of transitioning the patient’s care to comfort care.”
Brion Pearson, M.D.
Chief Medical Executive,
Sutter Delta Medical Center

“At Sutter Delta Medical Center, our most critical patients are treated by many different physicians and providers. We often witness incomplete and conflicting information given to these patients and families in crisis. The resulting confusion and loss of trust is difficult to overcome. This past year, the ethics consultation service has gone far to promote effective communication. They’ve facilitated needed conversations among providers and given dependable information to confidently guide families who must make difficult decisions for loved ones.”

Ann Segovia
Director of Med-Legal, Risk Management, and Compliance,
Kaiser Permanente, San Jose

“I have always found your ethics seminars and WebEx presentations to be great opportunities for improving my communication and ethics consultation skills. I have come away from them with practical recommendations for incorporating into my own practice, and I have highly recommended them to others for their benefit as well.”

Rachael M. VanDeBogart, M.D.
Hospitalist,
Novato Community Hospital

“The ethics service is an invaluable resource at NCH as we take on increasingly complex patients. Our bioethicist has over and over again served to work through issues in a fair and compassionate manner. Families and patients appreciate the thorough assessment that takes place; they feel heard and validated. From this open communication stems trust, better care for the patient and increased engagement from the staff.”

Bob Sypher, MSN, CNL
Director - ICU,
Eden Medical Center

“Resolving ethical conflicts in the ICU is best accomplished by professional services provided by an ethics consultation service. Ethicists fully understand the principles of bioethics and their direct application toward resolving ethical dilemmas. Here at Eden Medical Center, we have been graced by the presence of a bioethicist whose expertise has allowed us to slowly change our culture and build a clinical consensus that has launched new and refreshing discussions regarding autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice – the ethical pillars that provide a foundation for progressive conflict resolution and providing ethically optimal patient care.”
Timothy Takagi, M.D.
Family Medicine, Dignity Health, Sacramento

“As after suicide prevention experience, years of challenging conversations with my own patients, plus teaching residents and medical students, I felt comfortable with my communication. However, PMHV’s Ethics Summer Workshop provided experiences and new perspectives from varied disciplines in an environment that allowed me to challenge paradigms, grow, and (hopefully) get even better.”

Alan Yee, D.O.
Neurologist, Stroke and Critical Care Neurology, UC Davis

“As physicians, there are many questions for which we do not have the answers, and they would remain unanswered without consultation with the neuroethicists. I would like to see a neuroethicist as a part of our team and wish there were more of you.”

Diane Pege, M.D.
Chief Medical Executive, Sutter Lakeside Hospital

“Single-handedly the bioethics team has helped reduce burnout in our doctors and nurses who work in our ICU. We feel supported by them, and they have empowered us to help our patients. Working with these experts has become the norm: It is how we deliver care at SLH. The bioethics team is one more way we benefit from being part of a great system that truly cares about the patient experience and the emotional and spiritual well-being of its caregivers.”

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking the time and advocating for my father. Thank you so much for all you’ve done. Losing my family member is hard enough but this has relieved a lot of stress. I can’t thank you enough.”

— Cancer Patient’s Family Member, Sutter Delta Medical Center
Welcome and Introductions

Alexandria P. Lescher, D. Be., is the Program in Medicine and Human Values' Clinical Ethics Fellow for 2017-2018. Dr. Lescher was introduced to the field of bioethics while studying medical practice and policy in Copenhagen, Denmark, which led her to pursue clinical ethics as a career. Following her return to the U.S., she completed a master’s degree in bioethics and health policy, followed by a doctorate in bioethics with dual concentration in clinical ethics and public health ethics at Loyola University, Chicago. Prior to joining PMHV, Dr. Lescher interned in clinical ethics with Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare in southeast Wisconsin. Additionally, she worked as a researcher for the Ethics Integration and Strategy Department at Trinity Health. There she contributed to a wide variety of project on topics ranging from physician-assisted dying to ethics fellowship development. Dr. Lescher’s interests include ethical issues that intersect the clinical and public health spheres, such as vaccination programs and organ donation, as well as ethics education for current and future clinicians.

Ryan F. Holmes, M.A., Ph.D.(c), is the Program in Medicine and Human Values’ newest bioethicist. He joins PMHV after four years with the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, where he was assistant director of Health Care Ethics. Ryan completed a two-year Clinical Ethics Fellowship at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and has a master’s degree in bioethics from Case Western Reserve University and another in education from the University of Michigan. Originally from Pasadena, Calif., he has experience as a clinical ethicist throughout the state, including with UCLA Health System and Daughters of Charity Health System (now Verity Health System). He is currently completing his doctorate in Health Care Ethics from Saint Louis University. His dissertation focuses on conflicts around non-beneficial treatment and the role of ethics committees in these conflicts. His broader interests include end-of-life decision making, virtue theory and ethics education.

Program in Medicine & Human Values Staff

Back row from left to right: Antonio Kruger, Robert Fulbright, Ana Tyler, Ruchika Mishra, Shilpa Shashidhara, Guillermo Palchik.

Front row from left to right: William Andereck, Albert Jonsen, Linda Hummel.

Staff not pictured: Ryan Holmes, Thomasine Kushner, Alexandria Lescher.
Thank You for Your Generosity!

In this season of joyful giving, the Program in Medicine & Human Values would like to thank our Ethical Times readers around the world for your continued support. We are grateful to readers like you for your feedback, encouragement and profound generosity. We want to dedicate this edition of our newsletter to the memory of our Distinguished Publisher and longtime philanthropic donor Janet Pasha.

Generous gifts from partners like you rapidly expanded our ethics consultation services and scholarly presence across Sutter Health in the Bay Area starting in 2013. This enabled us to build a strong partnership with Sutter Health to provide our valuable services to all patients and families at seven Sutter hospitals. As we approach year-end, we would like to thank our supporters who have already pledged their support in 2017.

If you are interested in participating with a gift of support to PMHV, please visit our website at cpmc.org/services/ethics/giving.html. You may also contact Emilia De Luz at 415-600-4112 or deluzea@sutterhealth.org to learn about opportunities to invest in our current initiatives.