

Volgograd State Medical University
Department of Philosophy, Bioethics and Law

Lectures on Bioethics

Lecture 2.

What is bioethics?

Lecturer

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The coining of the word “bioethics”

- The term “bioethics” was proposed by a biochemist, Van Rensselaer Potter, in 1971 in his book “Bioethics: the bridge in future”.
- It originated at the time when negative consequences of the global anthropogenetic influence of human onto the nature became obvious.
- This moment can be considered the beginning of the synthesis of different theories, concepts and rules concerning the norms which regulate the attitude towards life into the single science.

Bioethics as bridge between facts and values

- Potter described this new discipline as a “bridge” between “facts” and “values”.
- During the second half of the twentieth century, he said that biological sciences had been increasing their knowledge and technical power continuously, but reflection about the values at stake has not progressed in the same proportion.

- Potter said that he coined the word bioethics using two Greek words, *bíos*, life, representing the facts of life and life sciences, and *éthos*, morals, referring to values and duties.
- The idea of Potter, and in general of bioethics, is that not all that is technically possible is morally right, and that some control of human intervention in nature and the environment, on animals and on human beings, is necessary.

- Potter emphasized, that bioethics must become “new discipline combining in itself biological knowledge and cognition of the system of human values”. Scientific and technical progress, according to Potter, leads to the gap between two fields of knowledge-naturally-scientific and humanistic. This gap is the threat to humankind and even to the existence of life on Earth.

- Instinct of survival is not enough, that is why one needs bioethics, which is “science of survival”. The development of new bioethical knowledge must produce new methodology with the help of which one can wisely use scientific and technical knowledge for the improvement of the life of future generations.

- Potter has seen in bioethics as a matter of fact new philosophy or even ideology which is called to unite biology, ecology, medicine and human values. Bioethics is not concentrated only on human. It extends to all environment, the animal and vegetable kingdoms, to all scientific intervention of human in life as such.

GLOBAL BIOETHICS

- Conception of global bioethics embraces environment, human and their interaction in the nearest and in the distant perspective.

Bioethics vs. medical ethics

- One profession dealing with life during centuries, especially with human life, has been medicine. But today there are many sciences and professions working in this field.
- Therefore, bioethics should not be confused with medical ethics, which is only one of its branches.
- The central value of medical ethics is individual life, The central value of bioethics is life in general.
- The subject of morality in bioethics is every human.

CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS OF BIOETHICS IN MEDICINE

- The appearance of the notion of “bioethics” itself testifies to the fact that our knowledge of human has become deeper and human relations with the world have become more complicated. It also refers to medicine.
- The necessity of resorting to the principles of bioethics becomes evident for medical workers when they find no explanatory procedures within medicine for solving different problems.

Problems of bioethics in medicine

1. The problems, which are significant to all mankind. First of all it's a question of the value of life and its correlation with other values (health, prosperity, love, etc). In bioethics the problem is more often formulated in such a way: life or health? And this is very important when it refers to euthanasia and also to the old problem of abortion. One can discuss here the problem concerning "the quality of life". This last term is often used now.

2. The problems connected with the appearance of new medical knowledge and technologies. Thus, with the appearance of new transplantation technologies of organs and tissues, a set of situation came into being. The problems of psychiatry and psychotherapy are of another nature. In the course of further computerization there arise new problems of the kind “man-machine”.

3. The problems which arise during the interaction of medicine as a social institute and with other spheres of social life. So, there is a serious difference between the ethic status of state insurance and private medicine.

About first group of problems in next lectures.

The second group of problems is connected with the adaptation of new scientific achievements in medicine into the existing system of rights and the dignity of a person.

- Thus, for example, the development of transplantation of organs and tissues' technology set the problem about the rights of a donor.
- The global income disparity is manifest in the ongoing practice of transplanting organs from poor to the rich.
- The medical tourism industry has provided a smoke-screen that serves to disguise the injustices associated with transnational exploitation.

- The question about the application of pharmacological means deserves special attention. The usage of psychotropic drugs and some other drugs with the same effect gives the cruelest consequences. Here one can see the change of one's personality and a question arises whether a doctor has a right to interfere into the inner world of human.
- One should point out that the list of such drugs has a tendency to constant increase lately.

- The third group of problems is connected with the cases of refusal to render medical help. They are of the greatest significance when there is a need of urgent help. But in modern time the refusal of medical help can have certain legal foundations.
- The way out from such situation is the development of insurance medicine.

Life as value

- There is the invariant of higher values which is meaningful to all people. These are the values connected with the existence of a human as a living species. The main one among these values is life.
- Bioethics is a science about moral behavior concerning only one value - that's life.
- Human realizes the value of life only through the notion of death. The death is quite opposite to the life according to the scale "good-evil", for many people die much earlier than they exhaust their biological resources.

- Naturally, people regard death as evil. But then comes the conclusion that the moral ideal in this case is immortality. Actually the ideal immortality can't be considered the moral ideal for the biological species exists only because separate individuals die.
- Religion tries to find the moral way out of this situation. In religious ethics there is a postulate about the life on the Earth as the preparatory period for the eternal life, for the life of one's soul. And the very notion of death changes in this context, it appears to apply only to the body but not to the spiritual essence of human.

- At the same time in religious morality there is a whole system of principles which specifically single out the value of “the life of the body”. Thus, for ex., the murder as well as the suicide is the sin.

- But whichever aspect we consider in connection of the problem of value of life, of life and death, we always find ourselves in the field of the principles of bioethics. That's because bioethics is a science about moral behavior concerning only one value- that's life. Or the most short definition: bioethics is the science of survival.

Quality of life in bioethics

- The most of specialists in bioethics define the quality of life as cognitive, social, physical and emotional functioning of human. The balance of the system of biological, mental (psychological) and social components in human represents the norm of the quality of life.
- Quality of life is identity of psychosomatic state of human to his (her) social status.

Components of quality of life

- physical well-being depends on physical activity, power potential, character of diseases, diagnosis, objective symptoms of disease, complaints and so on;
- psychological well-being implies emotional and intellectual;
- social well-being includes such aspects as participation in social life, non-formal contacts and limitation of social possibilities because of state of health.

Levels of the quality of life

One can distinguish four levels of the quality of life, according to the ability to self-production of vital functions. The more human needs external help for their preservation the more low is the level of the quality of life.

1. Normal quality of life. All physiological indices are in norm. Human does not think of own health, because nothing hurts human.

2. Limited quality of life. It is situation, when human suffers from some defects of physical and mental health, when functional abilities do not correspond to physiological norm. But in spite of physiological problems, human is able to manage them without help.

3. Minimum quality of life. It is situation, when patient and observers take note of substantial physiological aggravations with the limitation of personal freedom, possibility of communication, suffering and pain. Patient needs the aid of people for the maintenance of vital functions constantly.

4. The quality of life is below minimum. It corresponds to the situation, when patient suffers from maximum physical weakness and full loss of sensitive and mental activity. Such patients are in the stable vegetative state. Their vital functions are supported only from outside.

- Medical interventions have got the purpose to improve the quality of life. For ex., the quality of life of the mortally sick persons is improved owing to palliatives, which include qualified using of anesthetics.

BIOETHICS AS THE COURSE FOR THE HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE.

- There is concept, which is important for the characteristic of this aspect of bioethics.
- It is dietetics. This term was proposed by Kant.
- For him dietetics is the art to prevent diseases as distinct from therapeutics, which is art to treat them.
- The main rule of dietetics- spare no effort, not to weaken forces by comfort and idleness.

- Absence of exercising of organ is as harmful as its overstrain.
- The motto of antique philosophers “self-control and abstinence” is fit the characteristic of dietetics as the science about health.

THE HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE.

- The healthy way of life is the way of organization of production, living and cultural aspects of vital activity, which allows to realize human creative potential.
- Main rules, which must be put in the basis of the healthy way of life:
 - 1. Observance of daily time-table (labour, rest and sleep) in conformity with daily biorhythm;

- 2. Motive activity, which includes systematic occupations of the available types of sport, health-improvement (race, rhythmical and static gymnastics, walking in the open);
- 3. Skill to remove nervous stress with the help of muscular relaxation;
- 4. Reasonable using of the methods of steeling in cold water;
- 5. Rational feeding.

Ethical problems of medical interference into the reproductive sphere

- During last 30 years auxiliary reproductive technologies help family couples, who have got problems concerning conception of child.
- Methods, with the help of which it is possible to solve the problems of child-birth, give possibility to have children by such couples for whom in 20-th century it was absolutely impossible.

- Such methods became particularly important because of changes, which take place in modern society.
- Modern style of life implies that the average age of women's first pregnancy is increasing, while the period of women's fertility is the same.
- Auxiliary reproductive technologies give a chance to compensate the lowering of fertility.

Main ethical principles of auxiliary reproductive technologies.

- 1. Dignity and individuality of human must be protected.
- 2. Any human must be sure, that during the employment to her methods of medicine and biology, respect of her rights and freedoms will be ensured.
- 3. Interests and well-being of some human must prevail over social and scientific.

- 4. Interference into the sphere of health can be realized only after human is giving voluntary and informed consent.
- 5. Where the talk is about destiny of embryo, consent of both parents is necessary.

Types of auxiliary reproductive technologies.

- 1. Artificial insemination by the sperm of husband or donor;
- 2. Fertilization outside the organism with subsequent implantation of embryo in uterus;
- 3. Ersatz motherhood (surrogacy)

Problems of reproductive technologies

- 1. Breaking of child's right to have mother and father;
- 2. Problem of human self-identity (who is mother?);
- 3. Real threat to child's well-being, physical and mental health;
- 4. Child is transformed in commodity. Ersatz mother sells child actually.