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UNICAMILLUS press series

International Medical University in Rome



# Health and Ethics

Moral Philosophy

edited by **ALESSANDRO BOCCANELLI**  
& **LAURA ELENA PACIFICI NOJA**

foreword by Gianni Profita

**UNIVERSITÀ**

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## Foreword by the Dean

I cannot hide my pride and satisfaction due to the creation of this work, *Health and Ethics*. There are many reasons behind the final production of this book.

The first is a rising strong sense of belonging to an institution aimed at recognising the centrality of the patient as the inspiring principle. It does this by training its students to hold a firmly and secularly ethical vision of the medical profession. The moral primacy of the person in suffering has been at the base of the action of assistance of the 'Camillians' since the foundation by Camillo De Lellis in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. From the beginning, the rule of the members of the Order of the Regular Clerics Ministers of the Sick was that of giving physical and moral support to patients, even if by doing so they had put their own health at risk.

The second reason of such a pride is the universality of the ethical approach to the patient in a University willing to train students from all over the world, particularly the most disadvantaged. UniCamillus students, though grown up in cultures, religions and countries of profoundly different social, economic and technological backgrounds, will have only one language as a common reference: that of a vision firmly focused on the human being, as it must be the main role of the medical doctor.

The third source of pride is that the book has been written by the students themselves. They have shown that they had absorbed the concepts of Moral Philosophy developed during the course, under the guidance of the editors of the volume.

I wish to thank Professors Alessandro Boccanelli and Laura Elena Pacifici Noja for bringing about this integral result in the first year of opening the University already. That encourages us to foresee great didactic successes in the following years.

I likewise wish to thank the students, who have shown that they have understood our goals, to the point that their examination was this book: young students, ad majora!

*Gianni Profita*

UniCamillus Rector Magnificus, 2020

## Foreword by the Editors

Ethical topics related to medicine are a matter of increasing importance. The rapid development of research has created new horizons, new ways of thinking and new possibilities of choices that create new ethical problems. Thus, we are in need of a “new” kind of professionals. They shall be aware of that, in order to engage themselves in a responsible debate and to give answers, while being in front of the patients, based on principles, knowledge and values.

Medicine, as all other health professions, is not completely limited to science. It was built on repeated and wide observation of sensitive phenomena, and despite any effort to elaborate the theories behind them, medicine is not a pure science, because it has a practical purpose, as the Austrian philosopher Seifert points out. Nor is it a mere empirical science, because it implies a philosophical foundation as much as the other sciences. In fact, medicine, like all sciences, requires an even wider philosophical foundation because its main subject is the human being “in condition of suffering and in need of help.”

As Josef Seifert claims, medicine has to find the answer to the question: “who is man?” in order to understand itself as a study. Science is not enough to find this answer, since the idea of the “human being” implies that we need to both refer to the anthropological background and be open to ethical questions. We are faced with a large spectrum of topics, ranging from coma to palliative care, and nutrition to doctor ‘Google’. Medicine is also relevant



for Human Rights, such as the discussion of Female Genital Mutilation.

Health should not be seen as a state but as the consequence of a process built on many factors. One of those being the ethical background of medical choices to give answers to questions regarding why and how care shall be given to the patients. What is the best for my patient? Shall I give advice or shall I remain completely neutral? In our opinion, these are the main questions but above all they remain rhetorical. In this perspective we have chosen not to give the students any pre-packaged definition and, at the same time, to give them more possibilities of discussion.

In the next few years, medicine and all health professions will face new and important challenges, firstly the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets.

Physicians will be required not only to hold thorough scientific knowledge, but also a broader knowledge of the important bonds between philosophical and ethical aspects of medicine.

## 1. Ethics and Narrative Medicine: An important bond not to be forgotten

Illness, as an experience, includes the relationship between doctor and patient. It must be added to the objective data of the disease in an integrated vision not an alternative one. Meeting, sharing, participating and sometimes assisting, reside in the development of the capacity to narrate. Only a minority of our health depends on health services and genetic heritage, while a larger part depends on the environment in which we live. This should be seen not only as a physical place, but also as a system of relationships and as the psychological, cultural and socio-economic conditions of our lives.

The training of healthcare professionals cannot disregard the need to deepen the knowledge of a patient's location in the world in which he lives and his relationship with this world. The time

dedicated to information, communication and relationship is a time of care. However, the transformation of Medicine from a “Medicine of doing” into a Medicine that focuses on the relationship with the patient, does not happen spontaneously, but rather almost by natural evolution. To make it possible, it is necessary to design specific training projects such as those at UniCamillus.

During their studies, future doctors learn many notions of things such as biochemistry, biology, physiology and pathological anatomy. However, they must always try to see the patient not only as an object of technical and technological investigations, but also as a subject of experiences. At UniCamillus, we are paving the way into patient-doctor interactions in Italian medical studies, by role-playing and asking students to take ‘patient’ history in a more human way. Biology increasingly requires the counterpoint of biography. Therefore, we intend to construct a “narrative medicine” teaching course. This will give the student the cultural and methodological tools to increase a deeper doctor-patient relationship, both in the process of diagnosis and in the treatment tailored to the individual sick person.

## 2. The Research Project During the Course Was Entitled: “Come stai?” (How are you?)

The project is an assisted medical history project allowing the patient to tell his/her own symptoms and provides the physician or health care personnel, as end users, with a synthetic and formally correct medical history in which the symptoms are described through a series of questions. The system is applicable with a logical step-by-step process, also in multiple languages. The application does not aim to be an intelligent diagnostic system, but it provides a narrative file of the well-written patient’s symptoms. The medical history consists of a series of medical history information obtained from the patient to help establish a diagnosis and develop a treatment plan.

Taking a correct medical history constitutes around 40% of the diagnosis: the history can be automated by a system that guides the patient through a series of progressive questions about his symptomatology. This system is the Computer-assisted history-taking system (CAHTS). There is a great deal of literature on the automatic analysis of patient histories, but this is done using patient records.

### 3. The Book and the Course

The basis of the course was to provide students with tools and a framework in which they can place good “health” in a common context with ethics, human rights and all the relevant elements for patient care. This includes economic, anthropological, social and relational elements – so that in the future they will be able to treat their patient in an appropriate way to his being a person.

In a sector characterized by constant and rapid evolution, our aim has been to give the students the ability to understand the main problems they will face as doctors. The course also intended to provide a training programme aimed at ensuring, through specific focus, the most current and relevant issues in the field of health and ethics.

This is the motivation for why we decided to carry out an original method in our course of Moral Philosophy at UniCamillus University. The idea was to allow students to face the personal commitment required by an ethical approach in the different situations in which they may find themselves exercising their medical profession. The students were divided into 17 groups, each of which had to deal with an ethical topic and then give presentations to all other students on the course. The result was satisfying on the one hand because the experience was a first time for all. In fact, they had to make the effort to analyze, digest and re-elaborate for the other students, their principles and values on their chosen topics, on which they had merely lingered during lectures,

if not superficially. On the other hand, they found themselves evaluating the work done by their peers, perceiving the existence of many points of view.

Aware of the complexity of the topics covered during the course, we paid great attention not to influence the students with our personal opinions. For this reason, whenever possible we invited experts in the field who brought their own experience: in this book, you find their interventions too.

The main lesson learned by those of us from the transistor era, was to look at reality through the eyes of generation Z born having the internet available to them already.

This book is the result of the first year of the course.

Main Topics discussed during the Course:

- Ethical dimension of medicine and health professions;
- Relationship between science and ethics;
- Ethics of health: collective benefits and individual freedom;
- Human Rights and Health;
- Ethical Committees at different levels;
- Patient, ethics and communication;
- Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Millennium Development Goals;
- Global health and new challenges in a globalized world: Health diplomacy and Ethics;
- Ethics, Health and International Cooperation.

#### 4. How to Use this Book

*Health and Ethics* is mainly aimed at teaching students how important it is to establish a strictly personal relationship with each person to be taken care of and this makes the difference between being a doctor or acting as a doctor.

The topics covered are extremely important for all those who take care of sick people. This must take into account the differ-

ent possible economic, social, and cultural realities. We suggest all health professionals read it, especially so that the topics covered become food for thought.

This book was written by Medical students for Medical students, and is the result of interactive teaching in the course of Moral Philosophy at UniCamillus University.

The authors of the chapters have an average age of 19 years old: they enthusiastically adhered to the idea of transforming their presentations into a book. However, their enthusiasm should be met with some patience as their academic writing skills are not fully developed yet and therefore the book does contain some consequent errors. Nonetheless, we decided to respect their work, in favor of the freshness of the result and to help them in the maturing process. Therefore, we demand to that you as the reader forgive us for the presence of inaccuracies, the disparity of writing and composition.