

MSc Healthcare Ethics & Law

Module breakdown

Module 1: Introduction to Healthcare Ethics & Law

Aim

This module is a foundation module. It introduces the students to the philosophical and legal principles that underpin healthcare ethics and law.

Course introduction

- Introduce the course, the timetable for lectures and assessments.
- Explain the course goal of developing transferrable skills, a goal central through all the modules.
- Explain the *range of teaching methods* used in the course: explanatory lectures, in seminar discussions of alternative perspectives on issues in law and ethics and practice case study analyses, and advanced skill development in essay composition.
- Introduce students to the library facilities for the course.
- Explain and illustrate web-based research.
- Demonstrate Moodle and the Virtual Learning Facility (VLE).
- A reading list and website resources is supplied to the students.

Ethical topics

1. Ethical systems
 - Deontology
 - Utilitarianism/consequentialism
 - Communitarianism
 - Rights theories
 - Virtue ethics
2. Core ethical principles
 - Autonomy
 - Beneficence
 - Non-maleficence
 - Justice
3. Applying theories and principles to case studies
4. Methodologies for analysing ethical dilemmas
5. Features of moral character of the healthcare professional
6. Role of cultural and religious principles on ethical decision-making
7. The concept 'duty of care' and its application in healthcare

Legal topics

1. Basic concepts of law including:
 - What is law?
 - What is a legal system?
 - The history, characteristics and sources of the law
 - Classifications of law
 - Patient confidentiality
2. Medical law and how it is applied internationally and in Ireland
3. Professionalism in healthcare and patient safety

Researching

1. Library searching and the use of Endnote. How to write a critical analysis of an article.

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Module 2: Autonomy and Paternalism

Aim

The relationship between healthcare professionals and patients has changed significantly over the last 30 years. This module explores in some detail the many changes that have occurred in this relationship and examines the implications of these changes for patients and healthcare professionals. Important themes such as patient and professional autonomy are explored as well as the implications of autonomy for confidentiality and consent.

Ethical topics

1. Healthcare professionalism and its implications for healthcare professionals.
2. Issues which arise in consenting adults, children and people who lack capacity.
3. Data protection and privacy
4. Ethical and legal issues arising in health and safety.
5. Human rights and their application to healthcare
6. Global ethics

Legal topics

- 1) The autonomy of the patient and the healthcare professional
- 2) Legal implications of consenting adults, children and people who lack capacity.
- 3) Legal implications of patient confidentiality and data protection.
- 4) The medical regulations currently applicable in Ireland concerning consent and confidentiality.
- 5) The Human Rights Act and its application to healthcare.

Module 3: The Beginning of Life – Ethical and Legal Issues

Aim

Due to the increasing availability of new technologies, human reproduction has become ethically and legally controversial. People who engage in healthcare need to be aware of the diverse ethical views expressed about these new technologies. They also need to be aware of how different jurisdictions have legislated to address the issues that have arisen. The aim of this module is to introduce students to the moral and legal status of the human foetus, the issues involved in termination of pregnancy and the various ethical and legal issues that arise in a range of assisted reproduction technologies.

Ethical topics

1. The moral status of the human embryo/foetus.
2. The personhood debate.
3. The diverse ethical issues that arise in discussions regarding the termination of pregnancy for therapeutic and social reasons.
4. The ethical issues that arise in the following forms of assisted reproduction:
 - In vitro fertilization
 - Insemination with sperm of living partners, donors, or deceased partners.
 - Surrogacy
 - Sex selection

Legal topics

1. The civil legislation governing reproduction in Ireland and internationally.
2. The medico-legal issues in obstetrics and gynaecology.
3. The civil legislation governing the termination of pregnancy in Ireland and internationally.
4. Legislation regarding assisted reproduction.

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Module 4 : The End of Life – Ethical and Legal Issues

Aim

The care of patients as their lives draw to a close raises many important ethical and legal questions. Controversial debates have developed as society changes its views on what type of treatment should be offered and how it is delivered. This module will explore many of the issues which occur in the care of patients at the end of their lives. The aim of this module is to ensure that students gain a good understanding of the different ethical and legal issues that may arise in end-of-life care. It will also explore how autonomy has increasingly affected decision making at the end of life and how this impacts on the responses of healthcare professionals.

Ethical topics

1. The distinction between ordinary and extraordinary treatment and beneficial and non-beneficial care at the end of life.
2. Ethical issues in breaking bad news.
3. Ethical issues in non-treatment decisions with competent adults, children and neonates.
4. Ethical issues in non-treatment decisions with incompetent adults.
5. Ethical issues in pain management and futile care.
6. Ethical challenges in use of artificial nutrition and hydration.
7. Ethical issues in hospice and palliative care.
8. The differences between euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.
9. Ethical issues in euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.

Legal topics

1. The legal issues involved in end-of-life decision-making.
2. The legal issues in palliative sedation.
3. Legal questions about withholding or withdrawing of ANH.
4. Legislation that permits euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.
5. The medical codes in Ireland concerning end of life care.
6. How to analyse a legal judgement.

Module 5: Public Health

Aim

How the public perceive healthcare and health delivery has becoming increasingly important. Governmental policies on how health care is provided raise important ethical issues for society. This module will introduce students to the ethical issues that arise when the topic of resource allocation is addressed. It will examine the legal and ethical issues in mental healthcare, intellectual disability and neuro-ethics. Legal and ethical issues that arise in human enhancement will be explored.

Ethical topics

1. Current legal and ethical debates in the allocation of healthcare resources.
2. Ethical issues in psychiatric care.
3. Specific ethical issues that arise in caring for persons with an intellectual disability.
4. Ethical issues in neuro-ethics.
5. The ethical issues which arise in public health.
6. The ethical issues which arise in organ donation.
7. Ethical case studies.

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Legal topics

1. Mental health law in Ireland.
2. The legal issues which arise in public health.
3. The legal issues which arise in organ donation.

Module 6: Research Methods

Aim

This module provides participants with the tools and skills necessary to apply appropriate research methodologies and to complete a dissertation to MSc standard. It will explore the legal and ethical issues when conducting human and animal research.

Researching

1. Web-based and data based research.
2. Online resources for scientific research.
3. Plagiarism.
4. Use of Endnote.
5. Requirements for a scientific presentation of an MSc dissertation.
6. Research skills and tools to complete a dissertation.
7. How to analyse an article.
8. How to analyse a legal judgement.

Ethical and legal topics

1. Why research needs to be ethically examined and regulated.
2. Core requirements to ensure that research is properly conducted.
3. Meaning and implications of research integrity.
4. Occupational fraud.
5. Conducting research in developing countries.
6. Legal and ethical implications of bio-banks.
7. Conducting research on animals.
8. Risk management and patient safety.
9. Whistle blowing and regulatory structures for patient safety in Ireland.

Module 7: Implications of the New Genetics

Aim

The development of genetics particularly human genetics has raised significant ethical and legal issues. This module will address these issues arising in genetic testing, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, human stem cell research and human cloning.

Ethical topics

1. The major ethical issues in genetic testing, diagnosis and family genetic testing.
2. Designing life: The ethics of genetically engineering the perfect baby (ethical implications of prenatal genetic diagnosis – gene manipulation and gene selection)
3. Modifying the body and human enhancement.
4. Issues arising in embryonic and adult stem cell research and treatment.
5. Human cloning.
6. Clinical and organisational ethics.
7. Big data and artificial intelligence.

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Legal topics

1. Legal issues in genetic testing and diagnosis.
2. Regulations for prenatal genetic testing and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis.
3. Guidelines regarding embryonic and adult stem cell research.
4. Legal regulations regarding human cloning.
5. Development of governmental policies regarding genetics.
6. The role and function of Medical Council

Module 8 :Dissertation

Aim

All students are required to submit a dissertation of 16,000 words on a topic of their choice. Each student is assigned a dissertation director who will assist them in their work.

The dissertation aims to encourage students to engage in more in-depth and systematic research in their chosen topic.

Key components of the Dissertation

1. The student selects a topic under the general title of healthcare ethics and law.
2. The aims of the dissertation are explained clearly.
3. The student develops fluency in the following skills:
 - Structuring a coherent set of chapters to present the dissertation topic.
 - Addressing the existing scholarly writing for the chosen topic.
 - Gathering and presenting an extended bibliography
 - Writing appropriate footnotes or endnotes in support of the main text.
4. The student knows how to analyse and assess the essential issues and arguments of the chosen topic.
5. The student personally evaluates the evidence to support the arguments of the dissertation.
6. The student critically comments on the issues raised by the topic at an advanced level.
7. The student knows how to present a dissertation in proper form.

Research supervision

At the start of the second year, student will be assisted in choosing an appropriate supervisor depending on the topic of the research project chosen.