Autonomy and Paternalism

The Doctor-Patient Relationship - 1

Autonomy vs Paternalism

Dax Case

• If you as physician judge treatment would benefit Dax, what ethical principle would justify ignoring his wishes?
• Is it a justified principle?
• Must autonomy always mean respecting current wish of patient?

Models of the Physician Role

• Priestly – Doctor makes the decisions – Patient “follows doctor’s orders”
• Guidance-cooperation
• Collegial
• Engineering – Doctors offers the medical facts – Patient makes the decision

Each Appropriate in Different Situations

• Priestly – Emergencies – Patient wishes doctor to make all decisions?
• Engineering ever appropriate?
• Which currently practiced?
• Which is ideal to strive for?

Famous “4 Principles”

• Beneficence
• Nonmaleficence (“first, do no harm”)
• Autonomy
• Justice

Beauchamp and Childress, Principles of Biomedical Ethics

Autonomy

• Refusal of recommended treatment
• Request for treatment not recommended?
• Informed consent to treatment
• Truthful and reasonably complete information – Needed for consent or refusal and for information itself. – One reason for coming to doctor is for information itself. (“Is this serious?”)
Autonomy and Paternalism

Medical Paternalism
• Restricting patient’s freedom for patient's own good. (“Doctor knows best”)
• Can be “weak” (to prevent harm) or “strong” (to benefit)
• Can be in clinical practice or in policy/law
  – Is there enough FDA regulation of supplements?
• Can be pure or mixed
• Core ethical question: when, if ever, is medical paternalism justified?

What ethical arguments for autonomy?
• Promotes trust
• Leads to greater cooperation from patient
• Terminal patient can make critical decisions
• Other patients will trust when you say condition is not serious
• Patients might not even come for treatment if they feared losing control over decisions.
• Doctors don’t know patients well enough to know what is good for them.

Consequentialist Arguments for Autonomy
• Promotes trust
• Leads to greater cooperation from patient
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What if Consequences Better by Denying Autonomy?
• Is there a right to autonomy?
• Is respecting autonomy basic to respecting a person as a freely choosing being?

Argument for Paternalism
• “Contract” argument: by coming to a physician one is accepting medical expertise.
• Alternative view: one is only accepting that health is one of one’s values. Maybe it is outweighed by others.

Challenges for Autonomy
• Children
• Empirical evidence about patient abilities
• Alternative medicine
• Other cultural values
• Doctor’s mistakes