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Just Health Care?

VI Annual Swedish Symposium on Biomedicine, Ethics and Society

Sandhamn Hotell & Konferens, May 24-25, 2004

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Taking Account of the Outcomes of Macro-level Allocation Decisions on Ethics in Clinical Practice

Decisions regarding the allocation of health care resources at the macro- and at the micro-level each pose distinct ethical problems. Additionally, since these levels do not function in isolation, characteristics of and decisions made at each level can influence the context and consequences of decisions made at the other level. This interaction has received little scrutiny.

Our purpose is to focus attention on value-laden and deliberative elements of the micro-level which should form a part of the evidence base for health policy. To examine the interaction between macro-level health care allocation and ethics at the micro-level, we use the Benchmarks of Fairness for Health Care Reform, developed by Norman Daniels et al. This framework provides a comprehensive account of the health care system domains where concerns about fairness can arise. Starting from the standpoint of health care providers and patients, we examine how the efficacy, equity and deliberation at the micro-level of health care delivery could be affected by macro-level decisions in each domain. So far, such micro-level impacts as physician behavior or patients' trust in providers have been the object of some scrutiny. A more systematic examination, however, reveals other areas where further research is needed if we are to foster health policy that is attentive to effects on ethics in clinical practice. In addressing these interactions, ethicists can begin to fully understand the ramifications of organizational ethics, of the ethics of the doctor-patient relationship, and of the ways they affect each other.



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