
VIII Annual Symposium on Biomedicine, Ethics and Society: “Rethinking Informed Consent: The limits of autonomy”

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In bed with the enemy – Autonomy in an interdependent world

The principle of autonomy has been prominent within medical ethics since the formulation of the Nuremberg Code and has led to the acceptance of the notion of informed consent as *the* basic foundation for human relationships within the health care system. This has basically reduced the patient to a customer and the health care system to a grocery store.

But as the principle of autonomy and the notion of informed consent have invaded human relationships in the health care system, it has become more and more obvious that the whole notion of autonomy is severely flawed. From both philosophical and practical perspectives critical voices have pointed out the unsubstantial understanding of human existence that the principle of autonomy rests upon and the problems that the focus on informed consent raises in practical life.

The most obvious problem with the blind focus on autonomy is the non-cognition of the multitude of ways we are bound to each other through feelings, obligations, responsibility and sheer desperation – in other words the interdependence of human existence.

The talk will explore some of problems that the exaggerated importance given to autonomy and informed consent raise in everyday hospital settings, pinpoint some of the reasons that it could go so wrong and make suggestions to other ways of understanding human beings that could lead to a more qualified use of the principle of autonomy in our ethical understanding and dealings with each other.