



Ball State Philosophy Outreach Project Lesson Plan

Topic: Medical Ethics

Time: 50-60 minutes

Credits: Inspired by a lesson by David W. Concepción, PhD

Learning objectives:

1. Students identify to what extent an individual's personal liberty should be honored when deciding who should gain access to a scarce life saving resource.
2. Students explore the ethics of making decisions about who lives and who dies when many people need access to a scarce life-saving resource.
3. Students explore what makes a human life more or less valuable than another when presented with extenuating circumstances.

Intro (15-20min):

- Ask students if they believe one human life should ever be valued more than another. Ask them to give reasons and encourage discussion.
- Present to your students the dilemma of having a limited life-saving resource and an abundance of people who need it. Ask students if they believe the decision of who gets access to the resource should be randomized (lottery) or if the circumstance and characteristics of the individuals should be considered. Discuss.

Intro (30-35min):

Assign three student volunteers these fictional identities and/or utilize the attached slides.

1. John W. (White, male, American, age 39)
 - Occupation: physician, instructor in medical school.
 - Family: separated. Wife (35, not employed). Daughter (15), son (8, who has an intellectual disability).
 - Family income is 250,000 per year from John's employment alone.
 - John W. has been working with a medical team at the university hospital on a cancer research project and asserts that he is "on the verge of a breakthrough in cancer detection."
 - Colleagues say he is brilliant, but sometimes hard to work with because he can be very impatient.
 - John struggled with alcoholism in his late twenties and early thirties, but has been sober for the past five years with a few relapses.
 - Very active in youth activities, soccer coach and Boy Scout troop leader.
 - Separated from his wife because of his increasing dedication to his medical work, has been very distant from his children since the separation

2. Norma D. (Black, female, American, age 68)
 - Occupation: retired school teacher, volunteers at local hospital
 - Family: widowed, husband died of throat cancer 1 year ago. Son (38)
 - Norma's family and friends describe her as hardworking, smart, and kind
 - Norma has been extremely involved in her community throughout her life, volunteering at the hospital and church in her spare time
 - Extremely active in the Christian church, leads Bible studies and prayer groups
 - Recently has had to cut down on her volunteer efforts due to her husband's death taking a toll on her mental health
 - Norma's son plans to move Norma closer to him in order to help her cope with the loss of her husband if she gains access to the life-saving resource

3. Laura T. (White, female, American by marriage, Irish citizen, age 34)
 - Occupation: stay-at-home mother
 - Family: Husband (37, bartender, convicted felon on parole), Son (16), Daughter (14), Son (11), Son (10), Daughter (6), Son (3). Family income: \$25,000 per year from husband
 - Laura is currently pregnant
 - Has high school diploma
 - Extremely devoted to her children and family life, but friends and family say she isn't frugal enough with her money in order to provide for her large family
 - Laura is very concerned about how her children's livelihoods would suffer if she were to be denied access to the lifesaving resource
 - Laura's family and friends say she is the sole caretaker of her children, her husband is not reliable enough to care for their family

Have students pick 1 person they think should be given access to and saved by the medical resource or decide that the lottery decision-making method should be used.

After they decide, separate class into 4 different groups:

1. Lottery decision-making method should be used
2. John W. should be saved
3. Norma D. should be saved
4. Laura T. should be saved

Have students discuss with their groups and come up with a short summary of their argument that supports their choice.

Have a spokesperson for each group present their group's reasoning.

Encourage the student volunteers to defend “themselves” as arguments are presented so long as they aren’t altering or adding to the original biographical information.

Encourage students to switch groups if they are persuaded by other arguments.

If any students do move, ask them why they moved/what part of their classmates’ argument persuaded them.

Conclusion (10min):

Ask students to consider how the ethical practices discussed throughout this lesson may be applied to other situations.

- If we allow human beings to make decisions about the value of lives in these dire circumstances, should human beings be allowed to make these decisions in all dire circumstances?
- What conditions, if any, must be met for it to be considered ethical for humans to decide who should live or die?
- Is it ever ethical to do so?

Ask students to reflect on how their initial opinions may have changed throughout the course of the activity and discussion. Encourage anyone who wants to share with the class.