

BIOETHICS & HUMANITIES NEWSLETTER



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WELCOME...

Welcome to the monthly Bioethics and Humanities Newsletter provided by the Program in Bioethics and Humanities at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

Program in Bioethics and Humanities: *Our Mission*

We are committed to helping healthcare professionals explore and understand the increasingly complex ethical questions that have been brought on by advances in medical technology and the health care system. We achieve this through education, research, and service within the Carver College of Medicine, University of Iowa Health Care, University of Iowa, and the wider Iowa community.

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PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHT

Empowering Adolescent Surgical Oncology Patients: Evaluation of a Novel Question Prompt List

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[Journal of Surgical Research](#)

Introduction: Many adolescent cancer patients experience emotional and psychological distress following a cancer diagnosis. Here, we describe development of a question prompt list (QPL) designed to empower adolescent surgical oncology patients to ask questions that are important to them during surgical discussions.

Methods: Adult cancer survivors diagnosed and treated for cancer between the ages of nine and eighteen and Family Advisory Council parent members at an academic children's hospital participated in focus groups to evaluate our novel QPL. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. At the end of the focus groups, participants were surveyed about QPL acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility. Thematic content analysis of transcripts was performed, and data were used to guide QPL optimization.

Results: Eleven adult cancer survivors and two parents participated. Ten key themes were identified: (1) emotional toll of a cancer diagnosis impacts the ability to ask questions; (2) QPL as a tool of empowerment; (3) provide QPL prior to surgical consultation; (4) provide QPL multiple times; (5) provide QPL in both print and digital formats; (6) QPLs can impact discussion quality; (7) QPLs can impact perception of surgeons; (8) QPL barriers; (9) using QPL with parents or caregivers; and (10) expansion of QPL to other disciplines. Nearly 100% of participants agreed that the QPL was acceptable, appropriate, and feasible.

Conclusions: Our novel QPL was acceptable, appropriate, and feasible to all participants. Participants felt that the QPL would reduce the emotional and psychological difficulty of discussing a cancer diagnosis and surgery for cancer.

To read the full article, [click here](#).



HUMANITIES CORNER



This month's spotlight is on **Tuan Truong, a fourth year medical student**. His creative work is a poem and a written reflection. He completed this creative work as part of the *Ethics and Humanities Sub-Internship Seminar*. During this Seminar students are asked to complete a written reflection or creative work that responds to a situation they encountered during their sub-internship that illustrated values in ethics, professionalism, or humanism.

Lost in Translation

"Just do right by me. Make it better."

He said yes...

Or the interpreter said he said yes. Or the family said the interpreter said he said yes. Or perhaps no one said anything at all and we filled the silence ourselves with what we needed to hear.

He nodded yes. But the way you nod when you are drowning and someone asks if you need water. The way you nod when the question is in a language your body doesn't speak but your fear does.

We asked if he understood. He said yes. We asked if he had questions. He said - "No". But he looked at us with eyes that whispered - *how can I ask questions when I don't know what I don't know?*

So he gave us the only thing he had left. Not informed consent. Not understanding. Just trust. Bare and terrifying.

"Do the thing that is best for me. I don't know anything. Just do right by me."

And we awkwardly smiled. We moved on. The box was checked. The plan was acknowledged. The team moved to the next room.

But I stayed there a moment longer in the doorway wondering - what he just gave us?

HUMANITIES CORNER (CONTINUED)

Explanation:

This poem reflects on an encounter with a patient who did not speak English and relied on a video interpreter and then later a family member to communicate with the medical team. It is worth noting that this was not a conversation about informed consent for a specific procedure, but rather a general discussion about his care plan and next steps. And yet the ethical weight of the moment was no less significant. At every step, the patient nodded and said he understood. But when asked if he had questions, he revealed something that stopped me: he said he didn't even know what questions to ask, because he didn't know enough to know what he didn't know. What he offered instead was something terrifyingly vulnerable and human: he placed himself entirely in our hands and asked us to be good.

BIOETHICS IN THE LITERATURE

- ⇒ Antommaria AHM, Keegan D. Addressing vaccine hesitancy amid changing federal guidance. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jul; 26: 103-105.
- ⇒ Becker C, Wechkin H, Bern-Klug M, Pope T, Levine M, Shen MJ, et al. Minimal comfort feeding in advanced dementia: Attitudes of hospice and palliative care professionals. [J Pain Symptom Manage](#). 2026 Jun 22. [Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ Butterfield S. How AI is affecting medical journals. [Ann Intern Med](#). 2026 Jul 7. [Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ DiDiodato C, Martin C, Austgarden D, McLean J, DiDiodato G. Goals of care discussions in hospitalised patients: Systematic review of randomised trials. [BMJ Support Palliat Care](#). 2026 Jun; 16: 757-764.

“Communication tools and decision aids improve ‘goals of care discussion’ documentation in hospitalised patients but show uncertain effects on other patient-centred outcomes or healthcare utilisation.”

(DiDiodato et al.)

- ⇒ Fong C, Park K, Rosen C, Ferreres A, McDonald M. Ethical considerations of social media use for surgeons. [Surg Endosc](#). 2026 May; 40: 3587-3595.
- ⇒ Fritzsche MC, Unruh CF. The concept of harm in medical ethics. [Bioethics](#). 2026 Jun 24. [Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ Garrett JR, Knackstedt AD, Kukora SK. Navigating ethical tensions when parents refuse medically recommended vaccination for children with underlying conditions. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jul; 26: 106-108.
- ⇒ Georgiou A, Williams K, Bonnici T, Metaxa V, Brummell Z. Measuring attitudes toward death and dying among adult intensive care unit staff: A systematic review of assessment tools. [J Crit Care](#). 2026 Jun; 95: 155659.
- ⇒ Jalilian L, Manafi N, Vandiver MS, Lukac P, Kadambi A. Clinician perspectives on ambient AI scribes in the intensive care unit: Qualitative interview study. [JMIR Med Inform](#). 2026 Jul; 14: e81445.
- ⇒ Jecker NS, Ravitsky V, Faden RR, Jaoko W, Moreno JD, Parker M, et al. How "America first" abandoned global health: The case for an African model. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jun 26. [Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ Kelly A, Mitchell D, Links AR, Beach MC, Boss EF, Thompson EC. Does clinical documentation reflect how parents and clinicians share decisions about surgery? [BMC Med Inform Decis Mak](#). 2026 Jul 4. [Epub ahead of print]

BIOETHICS IN THE LITERATURE (CONTINUED)

- ⇒ Liao SM, Blumenthal-Barby J. AI ethics 2.0: Why frontier AI demands a new governance agenda for healthcare. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jul; 26: 4-6.

“AI governance is already happening in hospitals whether or not anyone calls it that. Every procurement decision, every pilot approval, every choice to let clinicians use an AI tool without formal oversight is itself a governance decision, just an unexamined one. The question is not whether hospitals will govern AI, but whether they will do so deliberately....”

(Liao and Blumenthal-Barby)

- ⇒ Lyndon S, Behlke LM, Urizar JC, Daffner KR. Alzheimer disease biomarkers and assisted dying: When diagnosis becomes a deadline. [JAMA](#). 2026 Jul 9. [Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ McMahon GT. When the algorithm teaches-promise and peril of AI in physician learning. [JAMA](#). 2026 Jun; 335: 2105-2106.

“... these forces create a form of epistemic seduction, the tendency to accept information as true because it is fluent, confident, and coherent rather than because it has been rigorously evaluated. The answer feels authoritative and reduces uncertainty. The work of questioning it can be bypassed, often without awareness.”

(McMahon)

- ⇒ Navin MC. When vaccine guidance fractures: The ethics consultant's role in restoring clinical confidence. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jul; 26: 108-110.
- ⇒ Neuhaus CP, Pacia D, Salvagno C, Crane JT. Misaligned expectations: Motivations of medically underserved people to enroll in the All of Us research program. [Ethics Hum Res](#). 2026 Jul-Aug; 48: 6-19.
- ⇒ Olson EM, Saleh FM, Guarda AS. Resisting contagious hopelessness: Therapeutic alliance and the limits of physician-assisted death in severe and enduring anorexia nervosa. [Psych Res Clin Pract](#). 2026. [Epub ahead of print]

“When hopelessness is a symptom, hope must often be actively ‘held’ and projected by the clinician as confidence in the possibility of improvement. Instilling hope helps shape patient expectations and promotes treatment engagement.”

(Olson et al.)

BIOETHICS IN THE LITERATURE (CONTINUED)

- ⇒ Prince S, Ong S, Muyskens KL, Savulescu J, Porsdam Mann S. Medical artificial intelligence and the right to health. [BMC Med Ethics](#). 2026 Jun 29. Epub ahead of print]
- ⇒ Puche AC, Sultan AS. In defense of AI as an 'author' ethical implications for scientific authors, reviewers, editors, and publishing policies. [Head Neck Pathol](#). 2026 Jun; 20: 63.
- ⇒ Saeed B, Ahmed S. The vanishing bedside and eroding trust in teaching hospitals: A viewpoint on burnout and trainee identity. [J Gen Intern Med](#). 2026 Jul; 41: 2609-2610.
- ⇒ Tarzian A. Navigating ethical tensions in pediatric vaccination following changes in CDC guidance. [Am J Bioeth](#). 2026 Jul; 26: 101-102.
- ⇒ Topaz M, Peltonen LM, Zhang Z, Backonja U. The deskilling effect: Is artificial intelligence eroding clinical competence? [Ann Intern Med](#). 2026 Jun 2. Epub ahead of print]

“We can either heed the early warnings and build safeguards now, measuring what we may be losing alongside what we are gaining, or risk discovering the costs of convenience only when systems fail and skilled humans are no longer prepared to intervene.”

(Topaz et al.)



BIOETHICS IN THE NEWS

- ⇒ ChatGPT now has a space for sharing medical records. Should you? [CBS News](#), July 25, 2026.
- ⇒ A cutting-edge gene-editing trial in China went disastrously wrong. A family wants accountability. [Science](#), July 23, 2026.
- ⇒ ChatGPT led to a man's near-fatal health crisis, lawsuit claims. [The New York Times](#), July 22, 2026.
- ⇒ Severely ill prisoners granted early release are left stuck behind bars. [KFF Health News](#), July 21, 2026.
- ⇒ Embryo personhood, once on the margins of abortion debates, is moving closer to the center. [The Conversation](#), July 17, 2026.
- ⇒ What if burnout isn't the problem? [MedPage Today](#), July 15, 2026.
- ⇒ It looks like your doctor and talks like your doctor. But it's not your doctor. [STAT News](#), July 14, 2026.
- ⇒ Declaring death is not simple. [MedPage Today](#), July 13, 2026.
- ⇒ We've all had 'difficult' patients. But do they really exist? [MedPage Today](#), July 12, 2026.
- ⇒ Oversight needed on physician-assisted suicide for hospice patients, lawmakers say. [MedPage Today](#), July 10, 2026.
- ⇒ A new proposal for organ donation sparks concern. [NPR](#), July 9, 2026.
- ⇒ My search for a psychiatric bed in an overburdened health system. [KFF Health News](#), July 9, 2026.
- ⇒ Chatbots can help perpetuate stigma around certain health conditions. [Science](#), July 7, 2026.
- ⇒ How patients feel about AI-drafted portal messages. [MedPage Today](#), July 7, 2026.
- ⇒ No one teaches you how to zip a body bag. [MedPage Today](#), July 3, 2026.



BIOETHICS OPPORTUNITIES

ONGOING

- ⇒ American Journal of Bioethics: [YouTube channel](#) containing previous webinars
- ⇒ Children's Mercy Kansas City: [Pediatric Ethics Podcast series](#)
- ⇒ Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences: [Events](#)
- ⇒ The Hastings Center: [Webinars](#) and [Events](#)
- ⇒ [Health Ethics](#) podcast with host Bryan Pilkington, PhD (Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine): Find on Google Podcasts, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Audible.
- ⇒ The MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics: [YouTube channel](#) containing previous lectures
- ⇒ Michigan State University Center for Bioethics and Social Justice: [Recorded Webinars](#)
- ⇒ Office for Human Research Protections [Luminaries Lecture Series](#)
- ⇒ University of Minnesota Center for Bioethics: [Events](#)

BIOETHICS SERVICES AT THE UIHC

ETHICS CONSULT SERVICE

This service is a clinical resource for UI Health Care personnel who would like help addressing an ethical question or problem related to a patient's care. Consults can be ordered through EPIC or by paging the ethics consultant on call. For more information, [click here](#).



CLINICAL RESEARCH ETHICS SERVICE

We provide free consultation on ethical issues related to research design, tissue banking, genetic research results, informed consent, and working with vulnerable patient populations. In particular, we assist clinical investigators in identifying and addressing the ethical challenges that frequently arise when designing or conducting research with human subjects. These include ethical challenges in sampling design; randomized and placebo-controlled studies; participant recruitment and informed consent; return of individual-level research results; community engagement processes; and more. For more information, [click here](#).