

Mental Health Ethics: The New Reality

Welcome to the first edition of the Journal of Ethics in Mental Health (JEMH). This international journal offers new perspectives on mental health ethical issues from around the world. JEMH aspires to contribute to knowledge and clinical practice and to be a unique forum for discussion and debate of ethical issues affecting individuals with mental illness.

The prominence of ethical issues in mental health is undeniable. Increasingly, mental health practitioners, consumers of mental health services and their families, law makers, legal representatives, advocates, community service providers and other experts have recognized the importance of ethical principles and actions in clinical practice. Although there remains wide variation across the globe with respect to the role of ethics in mental health, there is an emerging consensus that the rise of the consumer voice has been the principal contributing factor to this new reality.

But the developmental path of an ethical focus in mental health has been incremental rather than dramatic or rapid. Differences between the integration of ethics into medical practice in general and psychiatry in particular have been significant with a key factor being the role of capacity in patients. Historically, mental health ethics has taken a back seat to bioethics and this is evident when one surveys the professional literature for articles on mental health ethics. There are relatively few articles on mental health ethics and they are widely dispersed.

For many practitioners the difficulty in having open, ethical debates on mental health issues remains a barrier, although decreasingly so. Understandably ethical discussions can be difficult, often acrimonious. Many practitioners fear repercussions from peers and managers or perceive pressure to maintain the status quo. There is also a reluctance to destabilize the balance of power. Within this context, the Journal of Ethics in Mental Health was born. The journal provides a forum for discussion of ethical issues affecting all persons living or working with individuals who are experiencing mental health difficulties in order to promote the awareness and understanding of ethics in mental health. The aim is to develop JEMH as the principal journal featuring mental health ethical issues in the world.

JEMH will publish an international, peer-reviewed, web-based journal and electronic forum for the exchange of ideas worldwide, free of charge, three times annually. An important goal is to increase awareness of ethical issues in mental health and to provide a place where professionals, consumers, family members, academics and advocates can voice their perspectives and experiences related to mental health ethical issues. Equally important for our new journal is to ensure that the voice of the consumer is featured prominently in articles and other sections of the journal. The journal is targeting relevance and applicability to mental health practice where day to day ethical issues are so crucial.

JEMH will re-evaluate old ideas and approaches, will strive for positive change through increased awareness and dialogue, will

evoke change in practice in the care of persons with mental illness, will contribute to policy development and will reflect honestly and factually on key issues for consumers and their families, health care professionals and other professionals. We encourage a diversity of perspectives and exploration of new and innovative ideas.

Complementing the publication of the journal, JEMH will sponsor an ethics conference every two years. The inaugural conference was held in May of this year in Toronto and proved to be very successful in bringing together a wide range of individuals and perspectives from across the globe. Thanks to Whitby Mental Health Centre, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and McMaster University for their invaluable assistance in this endeavour. Based on the conference evaluations, the program was exceptionally well-received by those in attendance. A number of the presentations at the conference are featured in this edition of the journal. Conference audio files can be accessed on the JEMH website (<http://www.jemh.ca>).

JEMH, as a non-profit organization, is managed by an Editorial Committee composed of leaders in mental health and law in Canada. A prominent International Editorial Board has been established and their rich and valuable input to date is most appreciated. Both the Editorial Committee and Editorial Board have consumer representation, an important priority for JEMH.

We trust you will enjoy our new journal. Your active participation and contributions will ensure that JEMH thrives and our goal of developing a forum for healthy academic and policy debate on a wide range of topics is achieved with clear relevance to, and interest for, consumers, families, service providers and professionals.

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