

Ethical Approach to Health Information Management: Pertinence of Ricœur’s Narrative Approach to Ethics.

Background

The increased complexity of health information management (HIM) “management of the acquisition, organization, retrieval, and dissemination of health information “ (Medline, 2013) sows the seeds of inequalities between health care providers, payers and patients. Patients may be more vulnerable to unconsented use of their data and breaches in confidentiality. Health care providers themselves can also be the victims of a health information system that they do not fully master. Yet, despite its possible drawbacks, the management of health information is indispensable for promoting science and public health.

Aim

Therefore, the central question to be addressed is *how to ethically manage health care information?*

Methodology

I briefly assessed standard biomedical ethical frameworks according to the health care domains in which they operate: clinical care, research or public health. Although they address the specificities of each of these domains, these frameworks are often too narrow in scope and insufficient to provide a single overarching ethical framework for HIM. Furthermore, combining their different moral theories in order to cover the complete field, analogous to the model of reflective equilibrium, brings about the risk that each framework loses its distinctiveness and its specific moral justification. The perspective had to be changed. Therefore, I considered the narrative dimension of health care information and the path to ethics by means of interpretation, while briefly introducing Ricœur’s view on interpretation and narrative identity. I argued that Ricœur’s ethical fundamental aim of “the good life with and for others in just institutions” provides an appropriate ethical oversight for managing health information.

Application

Ricœur’s ethical theory surpasses the binary model of moral rules guided by normative theories: Based on one’s own narrative identity, everyone is capable of action aimed at “good” and “obligatory”. Derived from Ricœur’s “little ethics” (figure 1), I proposed a simplified matrix to guide moral judgements for HIM. My intent was not to re-interpret Ricœur’s philosophical ethics, but to show its relevance for HIM’s governance and conduct in practical situations. I illustrated the use of this matrix with some examples of ethical resolution of conflicting issues relating to HIM.

Conclusion

Ricœur’s ethical theory has the merit of helping to harmonize self-esteem and solicitude amongst health care stakeholders, and at the same time, provides an ethics of justice in public health. It overcomes in particular possible conflicts in HIM between privacy interests and common good.

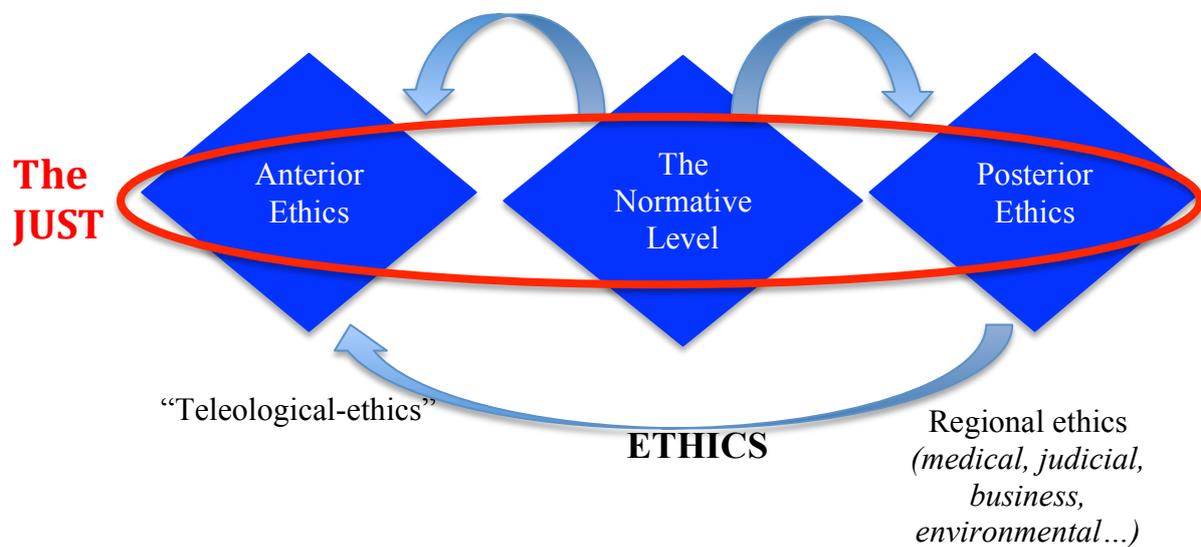
Keywords

Health Information Management. Hermeneutics. Justice. Narrative Identity. Self-esteem. Solicitude.

Figure 1

Ricoeur's "Little Ethics"

"(1) the primacy of ethics over morality,
(2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm,
(3) The legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice"



References

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