

Ethics & Medical Research

Respecting Privacy & Confidentiality

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- Amitai Etzioni, "Medical Records: Enhancing Privacy, Preserving the Common Good" (PDF on webpage).

Questions

1. What is the difference between unauthorized use and authorized abuse of medical information? What are some examples of each? What makes each of these possible? Which does Etzioni believe is the most ethically troubling and why?
2. Etzioni does not explicitly say so, but what is normally meant by the "common good"? What four common goods does Etzioni specify that extensive, centralized, and electronic medical records can promote? Why does Etzioni believe that privacy need not be heedlessly sacrificed in order to obtain these goods?
3. What are the differences between standard informed consent, specified consent, and implied consent? How are these all based on a philosophy of individualism? Why does Etzioni believe that none of these three are adequate for respecting privacy while promoting the common good?
4. What does Etzioni believe should be done instead to achieve the proper balance between the pursuance of common goods and respect for individual privacy? How is it derived from a philosophy of communitarianism? Do you agree with Etzioni proposal?