Rationale

- Being able to address thoughtfully and respectfully difficult ethics issues with patients, with families, with other health professionals, with health care administrators and with policy makers is an essential skill and professional responsibility of physicians today. This is not a skill that anyone has naturally; it requires formal preparation and skill development that addresses a broad range of ethics issues likely to face any physician.

Curriculum Objectives

1. Acquaint medical students with a broad range of ethics issues likely to be part of their professional life
2. Provide medical students with the ability to understand and utilize the literature of medical ethics
3. Give medical students the opportunity to develop and practice in multiple contexts a range of skills needed to engage in respectful conversations about difficult ethics issues with patients, families, peers, managers and policymakers.
4. Give medical students the opportunity to develop skills in articulating and fairly justifying their own ethical perspectives as physicians, mindful of the professional ethics codes that are formally authorized for members of the profession.
5. Give medical residents the opportunity to develop their skills in teaching about medical ethics with our clerkship students as a way of improving the ethical skills of medical residents in various residency programs.
6. Make ethical reflection a sustained habit by having significant ethics content in all four years as well as in all three years (or more) of residency training.

Description of Curriculum

Y1: Six-week ethics module, two hours of small group per week, foundational clinical ethics topics; 15-minute “TED-like” lectures each week; short essays for evaluation. Also: four weeks of two hour small group “history of medicine” with a focus on evolution of medical values; AND four weeks of “stories of medicine”…physician and patient narratives, again, value-focused.

Y2: Medical ethics discussion for at least one hour in each PBL domain; the ethics issues emerging from PBL cases; more complex than cases in Y1.

Y2: Health policy module for 6 weeks (two hours per week for small group and 15 minute “TED-like” lectures) that included discussion of health care justice and bedside rationing issues; might also include public health ethics issues.

Y3: We would want to see at least one-hour of formal ethics reflection included in each clerkship related to actual cases in that clerkship guided by residents serving as preceptors. This would be part of their training. Issues in professional ethics would go here.

Y4: This would include additional formal ethics teaching in advanced clerkships; some version of the Integrative Exercise would be placed here as well as one sort of capstone experience (and it would include ethical analysis). There would also be short specialized ethics selectives for interested students.

Discussion

The most important point of this curricular proposal is that ethics would be an integral part of all four years of the curriculum. The general idea is that this would facilitate ethical skills becoming an engrained habitual part of the practice of these physicians. Space does not permit explaining the more innovative features of this curricular proposal, but we would work to come up with innovative feasible ways on incorporating ethics into many of the other key portions of the curriculum.