

International Expert Meeting „Ethics in Oncology: New ethical issues“

May 11-12, 2012

Organisers:

Institute for History and Ethics of Medicine, Heidelberg University and
National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT), Heidelberg University Hospital

Target group:

Researchers and practitioners in the fields of oncology, medical ethics, history of medicine, philosophy, psychology, theology, law, nursing and social work who have interdisciplinary research experience in the subject areas mentioned below.

Call for Papers

The advances in oncological therapy as well as the knowledge of the limitations to what is possible pose major ethical challenges for doctors, nurses and patients: The possibilities for treatment in oncology are expanding continuously. As a result patients are involved with increasingly complex treatment decisions, including end of life decisions. As a consequence doctors must inform their patients adequately, deliver difficult news and advise patients and their relatives on treatment goals and changes thereto, e.g. when changing from curative to palliative care.

One question which is always relevant in this context is what constitutes good doctor-patient communication. Due to new and in part complex possibilities to diagnose and treat tumors we have to consider which criteria are ethically relevant, i.e. which criteria should tip the scale when deciding on tumor-specific treatment (also in advanced stages of the illness), on therapies with marginal effectiveness or when dealing with patients in geriatric oncology.

Genetic testing of the tumor genome is fast becoming a common part of routine diagnosis and treatment planning. In future it is to be extended to the healthy genome. How can the information that was obtained coincidentally or intentionally be used responsibly?

Treatment often entails serious side effects, e.g. loss of fertility. In addition to the standard procedure of cryopreservation of sperm and embryos, research is currently being conducted on alternatives such as oocyte cryopreservation for single women or prepubertal girls. What is the risk-benefit analysis of this treatment and which ethical questions result from it?

Old patients are also confronted with specific questions and problems in oncological treatment. Physical as well as cognitive limitations are a particular challenge when communicating with the patient. Therapists have to be especially careful and thoughtful when supporting autonomous decision-making. Comorbidities and low functional reserves have a negative impact on patients' quality of life, especially in the case of complex treatments with extensive side-effects.

At a societal level the question of a just allocation of resources arises: The proportion of cancer patients is on the rise because the population is ageing and new therapies enable cancer patients to live longer. On the other hand, these therapies are very cost-intensive and are said to have an "explosive effect" on our health care system which is solidarity-based. What price are we willing to pay for new therapies? Should these therapies be linked to effectiveness and what should a fair distribution look like?

These controversial issues in medical ethics are not only important for oncology but they are especially relevant in this field and have not been addressed in detail. This interdisciplinary conference with experts from a wide range of fields provides an opportunity to initiate and deepen the discussion of the above-mentioned issues.

Researchers and experts in the field of medicine are kindly invited to submit a **500-word abstract** on the following topics by **November 31, 2011** at the latest:

1. Definition of treatment goals and communication
2. Personalised medicine: genetic diagnostics, biobanks and genome analyses
3. Financing new forms of treatment considering effectiveness and efficiency
4. Nursing and caregiving in oncology
5. Clinical cancer research: Opportunities, risks, perspectives
6. Vulnerable patient groups
7. Fertility preservation

Should you have further questions please contact Prof. Dr. Monika Bobbert (0049-(0)6221-54 5458) or Dr. Beate Herrmann (0049-(0)6221-56 37922); E-Mail: oncology-ethics@histmed.uni-heidelberg.de