



Conference: Recent advances in the assessment, diagnosis and MDT management of people with Disorders of Consciousness (DOC)

Ethical principles in the management of people with a disorder of consciousness (DOC) - A Roman Catholic perspective

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Scope:

- ▶ Biblical and theological foundations
- ▶ Key ethical dimensions
- ▶ Theoretical ethical principles
- ▶ Implications for the management of care for those living with 'DOC'

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Context

- ▶ Roman Catholic position - there is no formal position!
- ▶ Ethical principles in relation to DOC - RCP National Clinical Guidelines (2013)
 - ▶ Tensions in ethical approaches - consequentialist and deontological
 - ▶ Permeate all aspects of diagnosis, care and management
 - ▶ Complexity - from anatomy and process to care and management
- ▶ MD teams - incl. chaplaincy and pastoral support roles
- ▶ 'Emic perspective' of patient, family, community

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Mission of healing and care

- ▶ Jesus as healer
- ▶ Discipleship - has healing as a dimension
- ▶ RC presence in healthcare
- ▶ Encounters with serious illness - learning opportunities

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Theological and pastoral principles:

- ▶ Creation 'imago Dei'
- ▶ Respect for dignity and 'sanctity' of life
- ▶ Largely Deontological / Absolutist ethical principles
- ▶ Rights to sacramental provision - at all stages; families/carers

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Some starting points for ethical principles:

- ▶ Right reason and revealed truth - absolutist position
- ▶ Reading the 'Signs of the times'
- ▶ Professional relationship - respect, honesty, trust and confidentiality
- ▶ Communitarian approach: professionals, patient and family, faith community and tradition

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Ethical principles: the full dignity of the human person

- ▶ Holistic approach - includes facing illness and end of life care with the confidence of faith
- ▶ Community dimension - family and community of faith
- ▶ We care even if cannot cure
- ▶ Duty to preserve life is not absolute (Situation Ethics / Consequentialism) - e.g. medically assisted nutrition and hydration
 - ▶ Principle of proportionality - are interventions excessive or a burden?
- ▶ Duty to inform and prepare patients and family- including spiritually

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Theological context:

- ▶ Illness speaks to us of our limitations and human frailty.....requires a response of compassion.....and points to 'final healing'

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Some useful references:

- ▶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1980) *Declaration on Euthanasia*. Rome: Vatican Press
- ▶ Markwell, H.; Brown, B. (2001) Catholic Bioethics. *CMAJ* 165 (2) 189 - 192
- ▶ USCCB (2009) *Ethical and religious directives for Catholic Healthcare Services*. United States Conference of Bishops

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