

Bioethics and the Eight Key Questions

BY BILL HAWK, *chair, Madison Collaborative*

Bioethics, the study of moral issues emerging from developments in biology and medicine, demands our very best, well-informed and highly effective ethical reasoning. This edition of

Madison features health care practices and systems that touch many bioethical concerns. Huge moral controversies about abortion, surrogacy, organ transplants, euthanasia and equitable access often dominate university-based moral instruction. The vexing everyday issues of executing an advanced medical directive, having children vaccinated, alleviating medical errors, initiating hospice care and declining further medical interventions call for equally nuanced moral judgments. The Madison Collaborative: Ethical Reasoning in Action, JMU's effort to prepare students with skill in ethical reasoning, encourages a strategy of asking Eight Key Questions to assist in working through knotty bioethical situations.

Behind the pills, prostheses and palliatives that we have come to expect from the health care system lays a seldom visible

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arena of ethical concern: biological and medical research. Clinical trials and biological research are necessary to developing therapeutic drugs and medical regimens, but these frequently involve extremely complex ethical decisions. To how much risk may we expose research subjects? How do we calculate the risk and inform the subjects in soliciting their consent? Are some members of our society unable to make an informed consent? Tough ethical questions surround the frequent use of placebos against which medications and medical interventions are tested. When very

positive or negative results are discovered, should the research regimen be stopped early? These are but the tip of the iceberg of bioethical questions that surround the scientific research necessary to produce safe and effective medical interventions.

Early this summer Madison Collaborative faculty members were privileged to work with a company that assists and manages medical and biological research. Brian Hochheimer ('80), chief financial officer of Emmes Corp. in Rockville, Maryland, contacted us after reading about the Eight Key Questions strategy in *Madison* magazine. He wanted to make it available to Emmes professionals. The company contracts with the National Institutes of Health and other government, university and private research organizations to set up and manage clinical trials and research studies. "Ethical reasoning and clinical trials are intertwined. A clinical trial must have an ethical foundation in order to advance science," says Hochheimer. "Emmes is Hebrew for truth. Our work must be perceived to be truthful and accurate for us to be a partner in the scientific pursuit."

Bioethical issues will only become more complex and difficult as research and technology proceed. As JMU students and alumni such as Brian Hochheimer engage with those knotty problems, we want them to be change agents with a strong moral compass. Questioning our reflexive responses to complex issues with an accessible set of ethical questions, Eight Key Questions, is proving to be a useful way to clarify moral direction. As Hochheimer says, "The Eight Key Questions of the Madison Collaborative are woven into the framework of what we do at Emmes. ... An ethical approach to business is at the core of the Emmes culture."

Better ethical decision making benefits everyone. We encourage all JMU alumni to adopt the practice of asking Eight Key Questions before making moral decisions.



Emmes' director of human resources, Jennifer Hester, and CFO Brian Hochheimer ('80) discuss rights and responsibilities during clinical trials.



More about Hochheimer and the BKG at bit.ly/1JVBmpy