Ethical Considerations When Treating AIDS Patients

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In the contemporary era, ethics have assumed an instrumental role in all walks of life. The significance of ethical values has become critical in the medical and clinical paradigm. A wide range of ethical values and issues ought to be considered while treating patients. However, one of the most prominent dimensions where the need for ethical and legal compliance accelerates is treating patients suffering from AIDS. The legal ethics also surface in these circumstances supplemented by the state laws of essential protection dispensed to individuals as informed decision making while refusing or choosing to be tested for HIV and autonomy. Thus, it is essential to underpin the critical ethical and legal duty while treating patients suffering from AIDS.

To begin, healthcare professionals work in a diverse environment to care for patients suffering from AIDS. The ethical issues become very complex in settings involving HIV treatment. It is imperative to comprehend the knowledge, attitude and skills to respond to the critical circumstances in an ethically warranted and appropriate manner. As per an ethicist Fredrick Reamer, the HIV epidemic has potentially evaluated the moral standards of the healthcare professionals in a manner that no previous public health crisis did(“Nursing ethics in the care of people with HIV - HIV Management Guidelines,” n.d.). Despite the robust advancement since the previous decades, the statement is still true and poses several impediments for the professionals to treat patients with AIDS. It has challenged the professionals to evaluate their professional and personal ethical values to honor the ethical values of the professions among profound stigmatization of the affected elements. In addition, the ethical issues pertinent to confidentiality and privacy, access to innovative experimental measure and reproductive rights have been stressed throughout the epidemic of HIV because of the associated stigma. The intricate affiliation between the essential human rights breach and the impact and spread of HIV on communities and individuals is understood in the contemporary era.

Besides, the stigma related to HIV stems from the affiliation with the manner wherein the transmission occurs as sex between men, sharing injected equipment and sexual transmission in itself. A wide range of empirical studies has reflected that the people suffer from HIV discrimination subjected mostly by nurses ranging from lack of eye contact, prejudicial attitudes, use of excessive infection precaution, brusque speech and denial of care (Melton, 1988). For instance, pregnant women suffering from HIV or about to be pregnant are treated harshly than the others. The impact of these practices is detrimental. People often succumb to the fear of being discriminated and thus prefer not to access the treatment plan. The consequences of these aspects cause diminished self-esteem, rates of depression, poor physical health. Thus, stigmatization is a potential breach of ethics.

Moreover, it is widely known belief that there exists no legal regulation authorizing healthcare professionals to know the medical diagnosis of a person. The people with HIV are not obliged to disclose their health status with the nurses or professionals. Likewise, it is productive for treating professionals to be equipped with comprehensive clinical information to offer potential treatment and avoid the complexities involved in the treatment of HIV. Another critical aspect is the principle of confidentiality which is intimately pertinent to the concept of privacy. It is essential to mention that it is both an ethical and legal requirement. Though regulations related to ethical obligations and confidentiality are applicable on people with diverse health conditions, the confidentiality of HIV is accomplished after an enhanced significance and underpinning the shortcomings in the health-care system(“Harvard Health Policy Review,” n.d.).

Furthermore, one of the most critical ethical and legal principles is the value of informed consent. The necessity for the consent to be well informed is justified on the moral grounds of avoiding adversity, exploitation or unfairness and protecting the right to self-discrimination and autonomy of the patient. The following aspects comprise the dimensions of the informed consent: consent give voluntarily, competence, disclosure and comprehension. For instance, it is the legal necessity before undertaking the tests for HIV for a person to give informed consent. Thus, the person essentially agrees to tests on the grounds of comprehending the procedure, the manifestations for test and is competent to evaluate the personal consequences of tests. These legal duties ensure every person is responded and treated as a unique individual and helped to have informed decisions related to the care without being prejudiced on the basis of language, culture, economic status, health status or sexuality. Such critical are the manifestations of legal duties in the paradigm of treating patients with HIV.

Likewise, the legal concerns pertaining to the confidentiality of results of HIV testing and the profound access to care for treatment are regulated by several state and federal laws. Certain general principles are also practiced. The HIV infected prisoners and jails possess the constitutional right to be treated that ensures the adherence to appropriate community standards and the fundamental right to privacy about the infection status. Irrefutably, the prisoners; right to healthcare is discrete than the liberated citizens as prisoners ought to harness the corrections officers to meet their medical needs(“Ethical Dimensions of HIV/AIDS,” n.d.). To address the issue of consent, courts advance to pursue two definite approaches. The contemporary approach highlights the perception of the standard of disclosure possessed by several medical profession have a minor relationship to the data a patient needs in order to make an informed choice. Since the patients are sanctioned the essential rights to be aware of the implications of medical treatment or diagnosis, they ought to be made familiar with the material facts. However, the right to be informed is often deemed an issue outside the medical dimensions and thus outside the expertise of the healthcare professionals. The deliberated standards need to be pursued to establish a cohesive bonding between a patient with AIDS and the healthcare provider to address the legal and ethical controversies.

To conclude, ethics have assumed a core element of HIV treatment and it is arguable that professionals treating HIV have remained at the forefront of ethical and legal practices since the very beginning of the epidemic. The professionals need to be enlightened and made competent in making sound ethical decisions after harnessing the evidence. In addition, the need of the hour is adhering to the legal grounds to dispensing the rights of the patient with HIV in true letter and spirits. A wide range of crucial issues in HIV have been highlighted as the HIV disclosure, discrimination and stigma, confidentiality and prisoners' right to treatment, and informed consent. These issues are applicable to all the ethical and legal issues encountered while treating patients with HIV. The onus relies on the healthcare providers to contribute potentially for the best possible ramifications for people with AIDS. Promotion and protection of patients’ right, collective and individual advocacy, and adhering to the core basis of ethical and legal variables can remove the impediments to treat the patients. The bottom line is that several ethical and legal controversies encompass the treatment of HIV and the onus relies on the healthcare professionals to adhere to ethical standards and legal provisions without discrimination.

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