Philosophizing about Philosophy of Healthcare Ethics Practice Statements

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Abstract: Production of a written philosophy of healthcare ethics practice statement is a requirement of some bioethics fellowship training programs. Such statements may be standalone pieces or, as envisioned by the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH), included as part of a broader portfolio. In one recent move towards professionalization of healthcare ethics practice, submission and review of a portfolio was proposed and piloted by the ASBH as the first of a two-stage quality attestation process of individual practicing healthcare ethicists.

There is substantial guidance in the literature regarding the writing of personal philosophy statements in other fields, such as teaching. However, there is comparatively little guidance available on the writing of philosophy statements in healthcare ethics practice, including what they should contain and how they should be assessed.

In this presentation, I will discuss the different uses of philosophy statements within the field of healthcare ethics practice and their content and assessment. I will argue that such statements should recognize that successful healthcare ethics practice is multifactorial and consequently should not only focus on the writer’s philosophy of approach to clinical ethics case consultation, but also their approach to other common aspects of healthcare ethics practice, including organizational ethics and ethics teaching. Ideally, such statements would also provide some indication of the relationships between these different facets of healthcare ethics practice. I will also suggest it may be helpful for candidates to write an accompanying “un-philosophy” of healthcare ethics practice statement, which could describe a common misconception of the role of a practicing healthcare ethicist, such as acting as “the ethics police”.

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