

## **COURSE ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **SW 705 Ethical Dilemmas in Health for Social Work and Other Health Professions**

Course number: 31846 (3 credits)

**Fall 2017    Wednesdays: 3pm - 6pm    SSWB 2752**

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**Graduate student status required.**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** From a beginning in efforts to protect human rights in biomedical research, the field of health-related ethics, sometimes called “bioethics” has grown rapidly. It now encompasses such major areas as equity of access to, and delivery of, health care services, and the impact of the rapid proliferation of technologies (e.g. genetic and advanced diagnostic testing, prenatal, mind-altering and life-prolonging treatments) on how human life is defined, and on health care decisions and quality of life. While many of these issues, and the dilemmas they create, focus on the rights and burdens of individuals and families, ethical dilemmas in health have increasingly far-reaching implications for communities and societies. These dilemmas pose challenges to social workers and other social service and health care practitioners, administrators, policy makers and social and health scientists. Issues that have traditionally been private concerns are increasingly played out in the public arena, with passionate constituencies and extensive, and often inflammatory, media attention. The key roles and importance of well-trained and practiced social workers and other health care providers, administrators, planners and policy makers, in assuring equitable treatment and protecting individuals, communities and societies, provide the central rationale for this course. Course participants will review and use ethics frameworks and codes from a variety of health-related disciplines for decision-making, both generally and as applied to specific dilemmas, using a case-study approach. Participants will discuss conflicts between professional ethics codes and federal, state and local laws, regulations and codes.

**COURSE CONTENT:** The scope of the intersection between health and ethics is huge. This course cannot cover all issues, topics and dilemmas in one semester. A partial list of potential topics includes: content and application of health professional ethics codes and frameworks to health-related decisions and policies; ethical issues in health care resource distribution and allocation; conflicts between autonomy and beneficence in public health interventions; the role of social and health professionals and ethics consultants in hospital ethics review committees; competence assessment and health/mental health care decisions; informed consent, confidentiality and human subjects protection in health care and health research; access to, and the impact of genetic, fertility and reproductive technologies; ethical dilemmas and aging; advanced care planning, advanced directives and end-of life decisions, including neonatal and intensive care later in life or in “futile” situations; maternal/fetal conflicts of interest such as drug treatment or child abuse prosecution, coerced or forced maternal and fetal drug and surgical treatment; cross-cultural issues in bioethical decisions; the role of the internet and the media in framing bioethics and health care policy decisions. Additional issues and topics will be explored by course participants during assignments and class discussions.

**COURSE DESIGN:** This course is conducted as a **seminar**. This design assumes that all participants are adult learners who are responsible for, and actively engaged in, the learning process. You are the primary actor in developing your knowledge, understanding and skills through

class activities, presentations (instructor, guests and your own), reading, listening, discussion and from your developing experiences and insights. My role, as class instructor, is facilitator and guide. My teaching is less about lecturing than about planning class activities and identifying and providing many, but not all, learning resources that you will use throughout the semester and beyond. However, you are responsible for your own learning and much of the quality of your class experience. By University/School policy, I also evaluate your immediate classroom-related learning, and provide grades. This is a “hands-on” course. Beginning with an introduction of ethical principles and frameworks used to guide health-related practice and research, a case-study approach will be used to examine common dilemmas faced in practice from the perspective of policy-makers, health and social service agency directors and practitioners, communities, families and individuals. As course participants, you will learn and practice methods for analyzing ethical dilemmas from a variety of perspectives, including the professional and personal. You will develop, present and participate in analyses of ethical issues and participate in decision-making meetings. Participants will find, review and discuss news stories related to ethical dilemmas in health, including discussion of how media portrayals affect public perception of the issues. The course methods and resources include journal, book and media readings, presentations by the instructor, guests and class participants, small and whole class discussions, analyses of ethical issue case studies, debates in short and more in-depth analysis papers and in “mock” case presentations and meetings. In keeping with its interprofessional approach, students from different disciplines and/or areas of study and practice will be expected to draw upon and share their previous learning and work experience in the context of the course content.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** Upon completion of the course, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the key principles of social work and other health professional ethics codes that guide ethical decision-making and apply them in the context of social justice, human rights, autonomy, resource allocation and responsibility.
2. Identify how similarities and differences in principles and decision-making methods, across professional codes, may contradict and/or complement one another in health-related practice, and in relation to local, state, national and/or international law, codes and regulations.
3. Assess how your personal values may differ from, or are similar to the values of your profession in several health-related ethical dilemmas.
4. Demonstrate how individual, family and community resources, educational level, gender, ethnicity, religion or spirituality, age, sexual orientation, marital status and other characteristics (of decision-makers and those affected by their decisions) may affect ethical decision-making.
5. Analyze and discuss the role of media in framing discussions and decisions related to ethics and health, as it affects the general public and specific population groups.
6. Demonstrate their ability to apply ethics frameworks and critical thinking to selected ethical dilemmas that arise in health care settings, and in health policy development and implementation, through written analyses and through their assigned roles during case study/case conference meetings and public hearings.
7. Use an interdisciplinary case study/case conference approach to practice decision-making applied to several contemporary health policy and health care issues including genetics, maternal/fetal conflict, fertility and reproduction, beginning and end-of-life decisions (care, quality and length of life) and allocation of health-related resources.