

The Besrouer Centre for Global Family Medicine

Dr. Patrick Chege Memorial Research Award Poster Presentation

Description of the Challenges in Care of the Elderly from a Bioethical Perspective in Cuba

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Background: Aging brings with it a decrease in physical abilities, cognitive impairment and the loss of social roles and economic capacity, increasing the vulnerability and dependence of the elderly on their family or community institutions. These growing functional limitations of the elderly require a supportive attitude and care by people, known as caregivers who, in general, at the family level are mature adults who assume the greatest weight of their care and medical professionals. Communication and interrelation between older adults, their families, and caregivers reflect dynamics that affect the quality of care provided to them and could cause negligence and iatrogenic harm. On the other hand, the prolonged care of older adults negatively affects caregivers resulting in burnout and affecting quality of life.

Purpose: To describe the challenges present in the relationships of the elderly who require permanent care and, their caregivers, in the context of their family and community from a bioethical perspective.

Methods: Qualitative Study: interviews were conducted with the elderly and their caregivers and a focus group with health personnel responsible for the care of this population in the "Ana Betancourt" University Polyclinic in Havana, Cuba. Twenty elderly, twenty-four caregivers, and fourteen health professionals who met the inclusion criteria participated. The content of the interviews was analysed by the discursive analysis technique.

Findings: There was poor participation of the elderly in decisions related to their own health; prioritization of the opinions of their caregivers; limited access to information about their health; limited freedom to engage in activities independent of daily life and self-care; psychological dependence on caregivers; discrepancies regarding multiculturalism and moral pluralism.

Conclusion: Paternalistic and medical-hegemonic behaviours persist in health care. In this case, the elderly who although vulnerable, are morally autonomous and need to be supported to make decisions regarding their care as moral agents.