

Engaging Ethics at UHN



Left to right : Tara Madani, Ashley Tattersall, and Arman Pakravan

Counting what Counts

In the early 1960s, sociologist William Bruce Cameron wrote a pithy chapter called “Knowledge without Numbers,” in a lively text called *Informal Sociology*. That book contains the observation, often misattributed to Einstein, that “not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” This sentiment, or something akin to it, was often on our minds this summer as we collaborated with staff representing the meticulous — and endlessly patient — Data and Analytics team in an effort to revamp the glorified spreadsheet that has long served as the Clinical and Organizational Ethics database.

Data that can measure the “ethicality” of a healthcare institution are notoriously difficult to capture and interpret; for example, a high volume of consultation requests from a particular program or requestor may not be an indicator that something is amiss. Indeed, low activity in a database domain may be a signal that an educational intervention is needed to raise awareness, and a high-volume domain may suggest an exceptional attunement to ethical issues. It’s also true that the definition and duration of a “case” can be disputed, and efforts to ensure that comparisons are meaningful and useful are proceeding with vigour in a very few large healthcare systems across North America.

With these cautions in mind, we were thrilled to have an opportunity to think through our work flows, data fields, and definitional challenges with the D&A team in order to fashion a database and dashboard that can help us to understand where and how our efforts will be most effective. We are grateful to Michael Caesar, UHN’s Chief Data and Analytics Officer, and André D’Penha, Director D&A, for their enthusiasm and support for this initiative. Ashley Tattersall, Manager, D&A; Tara Madani, Senior Analytics Consultant, D&A; and Arman Pakravan, Practicum Student, D&A, have our deepest thanks for perceptive questions and determined efforts on our behalf.

As another often misattributed quotation goes, “Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection.” We appreciate the difficulties of categorizing and quantifying what we do, but we are committed to doing it as well as we can. We are indebted to our D&A colleagues for assisting us in that important effort. *AMH*

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Of interest

Special focus on education!

- Learning from teaching medical students
- Supporting the next generation of STEM leaders

Senior Director's Corner: The Education Edition



UHN welcomes thousands of learners every year. We are especially attentive as an influx, or a bolus as some might style it, is injected in the summer and fall months. The public may be aware that they are likely to encounter medical students, interns, and residents in academic hospitals, but what they may not appreciate (and we may take for granted), is the significant part that teaching plays in helping all of us, whatever our disciplinary backgrounds, to maintain and improve our professional skills, knowledge, and attributes.

Our department has had the pleasure of welcoming two ethics graduate students to our program in the past couple of months. Evan Mackie, our fellow, and Tony Kagouras, our University of Toronto, Joint Centre for Bioethics, MHSC student, have come to us with differing backgrounds, interests, and aptitudes, and they routinely challenge us to make our concepts, methods, and underlying justifications more transparent and accessible. They may not do this explicitly, but being an educator brings its own ethical responsibilities. Some of these have become evident to us in the development of our fellowship modules, and in drafting standards for our discipline, whereas others have emerged more organically as learners have shadowed us and reflected on our engagements with one another

and with our patients, family members, and with members of other healthcare disciplines. This month we mark the date, 18 years ago, when a dynamic young professor named Randy Pausch delivered his moving *Last Lecture* shortly before succumbing to pancreatic cancer. His key message was that "education best helps students by making them more reflective." Many of us would agree, and add that it helps those who teach by making us more reflective too. *AMH*

Collaborating with UHN STEM Pathways — Youth Outreach Program



Ohenewaa with her certificate of completion alongside Claudia on the final day of the observership.

Recently, our department had the pleasure of partnering with UHN's STEM Pathways - Youth Outreach Program to welcome high school student, Ohenewaa Djan. Ohenewaa was a participant in the Toronto District School Board's Black Student Summer Leadership Program. As part of that initiative, she spent two days shadowing Dr. Claudia Barned at Toronto Western Hospital. During her observership, Ohenewaa was introduced to the field of healthcare ethics and was exposed to the many ways that ethical decision-making is integrated into clinical care. Her experience included learning about the legacy of Henrietta Lacks, whose HeLa cells have been instrumental in modern scientific research, including research involving cancer diagnoses and treatment, the treatment of serious blood disorders, and groundwork that led to the development of the polio vaccine.

Ohenewaa also attended a seminar on ethical and psychosocial considerations associated with recruiting incarcerated individuals as transplant living donor candidates. These experiences deepened her understanding of complex ethical issues in healthcare.

day observership opportunities across UHN. These immersive experiences allow students to shadow healthcare professionals, observe clinical environments, and connect with leaders across disciplines. Observerships are available in areas such as Surgery, Nursing, Nutrition, Medical Imaging, Clinical and Organizational Ethics, and others. Each experience helps broaden awareness of the diverse career paths available in clinical care, education, and research.

We're happy to be part of this important initiative and look forward to continuing to support the next generation of STEM leaders. For more information on their programs, contact stempathways@uhn.ca CB

Reflections on Sessions with Medical Students

Since joining the department last year, TR-WP ethicist Jess du Toit has welcomed the opportunity to engage with medical students at the University of Toronto. In particular, she has enjoyed facilitating the case-based, small-group discussions with first and second year medical students that form part of their Ethics and Professionalism curriculum.

The aim of these sessions is to create an environment in which students feel at ease reflecting upon and grappling with ethical questions that arise in the course of routine clinical practice. These questions include how to deliver difficult news to patients and families, the nature and limits of the duties of confidentiality and truth-telling, and how best to navigate challenges in end-of-life decision-making.

One particularly impactful session required students to disclose a terminal diagnosis to Standardized Patients. As they practised the art of delivering unexpected and life-altering news to another person, the students gained a visceral appreciation of how body language and positioning, tone of voice, and pace of disclosure affect how such news is received. They also became aware of how difficult it is to attend to these things in the face of one's own discomfort, sadness, and anxiety. This session also served as a powerful reminder of the profound emotional labour shouldered by physicians — and other healthcare professionals — often quietly and with remarkable frequency.

Experiences such as these affirm the crucial role that ethics education sessions can play in shaping thoughtful, compassionate clinicians *and* ethicists. Ethics discussions push medical students to recognize the various ways in which good clinical practice depends upon the ability to navigate emotionally charged and morally complex situations. These discussions also deepen ethicists' understanding of how future clinicians reckon with common ethical dilemmas. And this, in turn, enhances our ability to support the hospital community with empathy, insight, and humility. *JdT*

In brief

Senior Bioethicist **Kevin Rodrigues** led an interactive discussion "Home First in Practice" for Allied Health staff at TG and TW.

Kevin and colleague TR ethicist **Ruby Shanker** spoke at the Home First Education Retreats for Leaders.

Senior Bioethicist **Jennifer Bell** has been named to the inaugural Executive Committee of the UHN Collaborative Centre for Health Systems and Policy Research.

Ethicists **Ruby Shanker** and **Jess du Toit** are launching the TR-WP Ethics Journal Club! Contact them directly for details: Jessi.ca.Dutoit@uhn.ca; Ruby.Shanker@uhn.ca

Meet Our Team: Tony Kagouras

Master of Health Science in Bioethics student Tony Kagouras has worked in the biopharmaceutical sector for almost 25 years, starting out in clinical research, moving through commercial divisions, and eventually landing a field-based role in medical affairs for the past nine years. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Biology from the University of Toronto and returned to his alma mater in 2024 to study bioethics at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. This led to his practicum placement at UHN under Ann Heesters' mentorship where he aims to gain practical experience in organizational ethics, AI, quality improvement initiatives, research ethics, and data governance. He is grateful for the opportunity and eager to take these practical learnings back to his professional environment.

Tony's interest in bioethics began while monitoring clinical trials in Canada, the US, and the UK. During these formative years of his career, Tony worked closely with investigators and study sponsors, giving him a direct window into the workings of clinical research at the ground level. This fostered an early and deep appreciation for protecting the rights and safety of study participants that has carried through the entirety of his career. For his masters studies, Tony has taken an interest in global health, organizational ethics, AI deployment in the corporate and healthcare environments, ethics audit, survey methodology, and where business ethics and corporate social responsibility intersect with bioethics.

On his own time, Tony keeps busy with his adorably hyperactive toddler son while longing for the days of world travel, cooking, playing music, taking photos, biking, hiking, snowboarding, and good sleep. *TK*



SAVE the DATE

**44th Annual Philippa Harris Lecture
on Bioethical Issues
In Cancer Care**

November 19, 2025 12:00-1:30

Via Zoom

[Register Here](#)

**Ethics and Caregiving for Persons with
Cancer**

Liv Mendelsohn

Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence

**Clinical & Organizational
Ethics**

Bioethicists help patients, families, and health-care professionals deal with difficult ethical issues in patient care. Bioethicists have special training in ethics, moral philosophy, and conflict resolution, providing confidential consultation and mediation. Bioethicists can assist with clinical, organizational, and research ethics conflicts, and provide ethics education. Our goal is to assist individuals and groups in solving complex ethical problems so they can make the right decision at the

Vaccine Mandates & Voluntary Consent

Current Ethics Fellow Evan Mackie recently had the pleasure of working closely with Dr. Maxwell Smith, Associate Professor and CIHR Applied Public Health Chair in Ethics and Health Emergencies at Western University, and a leading thinker in public health ethics. Max and Evan examined the ethical issues surrounding vaccine mandates. Evan is pleased to announce that the result of their collaboration has been published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, as "Do Vaccine Mandates Impair the Voluntariness of Informed Consent?"

Their work takes a critical look at the tension between vaccine mandates and the principle of informed consent. The authors attempt to resolve the incompatibility between informed consent's requirement of *voluntary* consent and vaccine mandates' appearance of *forcing* one to be vaccinated, which seemingly renders consent invalid. To contend with this dilemma, they draw on a theory of consent supported by Maximilian Kiener, known as Interpersonal Consenter – Consentee Justification, which posits that consent can be valid in cases of third-party coercion so long as the interaction between the consent-giver and consent-receiver is devoid of harm. Here, third-party coercion refers to cases where the party that issues the coercive threat is separate from both the person being threatened and the person receiving consent from the threatened individual.

The argument is then adapted to the case of vaccine mandates, where, for example, an employer provides the coercive threat (vaccine refusal = termination of employment), the employee gives consent to be vaccinated, and the physician receives the consent to vaccinate the employee. Here, the coercive party is separate from the consenter/consentee, and the consent-receiver (physician) does not harm the consent-giver (employee). Thus, it is argued that in this and other possible cases of vaccine mandates, the consent is voluntary. *EM*

To read the full article, which is available as open access, visit: <https://jme.bmj.com/content/early/2025/07/14/jme-2025-110950>

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