

Novel ethical dilemmas arising in geriatric clinical practice

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to determine empirically the state of the art of the medical care, when healthcare personal is confronted with ethical dilemmas related with the care they give to the geriatric population. An observational, longitudinal, prospective and qualitative study was conducted by analyzing the correlation between healthcare personnel–patient relationship, and ethical judgments regarding dilemmas that arise in daily clinical practice with geriatric patients. Mexican healthcare personnel with current active practices were asked to write up an ethical dilemma that arose frequently or that had impacted their medical practice. From the narrative input,

we were able to draw up a database with 421 dilemmas, and those corresponding to patients 60 years and older were selected ($n = 54$, 12.8 %). The axiological analysis of the narrative dilemmas of geriatric patients was made using dialectical empiricism. The axiological analysis values found most frequently were classified into three groups: the impact of healthcare, the roles of the physician, and refusal of therapy; the healthcare role of educator, caring for the patients' life and the risk of imminent death where the values found more often. The persistence and universality of certain dilemmas in geriatrics calls for awareness and requires a good training in the ethical discernment of these dilemmas. This would help to improve substantially the care and the life quality of this population.

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Introduction

The population of the world is rapidly aging. The overall population over 60 years old will double and will increase from 11 to 22 %—from 605 million to 2 billion—between 2000 and 2050 [World Health Organization (WHO) 2013a]. Most of this increase will occur in developing countries where the number of aging adults will reach 1.7 billion in the year 2050. This demographic transition is happening twice as fast in Mexico, and both the absolute and relative numbers of older adults in the population are quickly increasing (Cotlear 2011). We found a 15 % increase from the 1990s, resulting in an older adult population of 10,055,379 according to the census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology (INEGI 2013) in the year 2010. The