Introduction to Ethics in Health Technology Assessment

Critically Appraising the Primary Ethics Literature

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Use of low-dose computed tomography for screening for lung cancer in adults at high-risk of lung cancer. The test comes with a known high false positive and false negative rate and an uncertain risk of radiation-induced cancer over the long-term.
Bioethics Literature

Descriptive
- Qualitative and quantitative studies of beliefs, attitudes, experiences
- Use methods of psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.

Normative
- Studies examining the ethical justification for a course of action
- Uses philosophical analysis and argument
Quantitative Surveys

**Questionnaire:** How were items selected? How was the questionnaire tested? How administered?

**Population:** How identified and recruited (random or census)? Does method of administration bias who will answer?

**Analysis:** Appropriate statistics and analysis?
Appraising Qualitative Studies

• Was the choice of participants explicit and comprehensive?
• Was data collection sufficiently comprehensive and detailed?
• Were the data analyzed appropriately and the findings corroborated adequately?

Participants

- Selected with emphasis on gathering range of experiences to help understand phenomenon broadly and in depth
- Purposive collection rather than random sample
- Could be small sample
- Look for reasons to think that complete range of views may not have been captured
Data Collection

• Observation: direct or indirect
• Interview: individual or group, structured or open-ended
• Examining written material
• More than one source or method should be used
• Researcher’s standpoint acknowledged and questioned
Data Analysis

Saturation: Minimal or no new information found with further observations

Triangulation: Use of multiple sources of information to corroborate

Triangulation: methodological, investigator, disciplinary
• Utilitarianism
• Deontology
• Virtue ethics
• Feminist care ethics
• Narrative ethics
• Principlism
• Casuistry
• Axiological/”Socratic” Coherence analysis
• Interactive HTA (iHTA)
• Wide reflective equilibrium
• Social shaping of technology
Normative Bioethical Argument

Acceptable appeals
Tradition and current practice
Ethical principles
General ethical theory
Casuistry
Reflective equilibrium
Professional virtues

Unacceptable appeals
Historic facts
Majority opinions
Permitted by law
Mere opinion
Biologic truths
No right or wrong answer
Challenge 1: Defining Topic

A specific technology for a specific condition

Clinical epidemiology & economic literature “PICO target”
Searching the Literature

Primary studies relevant for ethics not always readily identifiable as empirical research in ethics:

- published by a non-ethicist
- published in a non-ethics journal
- lack an explicit discussion of relevant ethical debates
- not indexed using ethics or ethics-related terms.

Ethics depends on social and cultural context and values; national and non-English language ethics databases are important.
Takk!