Methods for moral inquiry in the context of HTA

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• HTA: Exploring the value of a healthcare technology

• Ethics: taking a stand against indifference towards human suffering, injustice, cruelty, and oppression, while recognizing the many challenges that are associated with that
Challenges

• Limited knowledge and understanding of the consequences of our (in)actions
• Radically opposing views of what constitutes a good life
• Conflicting demands from our commitments to different values (e.g., the tension between freedom and equality)
Example

• Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) in patients with minimal consciousness (e.g., after severe head trauma)
HTA Questions

• Does it work?
• Is it safe?
• How does the benefit compare to the necessary resources?
Input from ethics:

• The evidence that is collected derives its relevance from underlying values, e.g.:
  – Beneficence
  – Non-maleficence
  – Justice
Facts & Values

• NOT: collect the data, and then raise the value issue, but

• Explore what the values are that explain why we ask *these* questions and why we collect *this* evidence
Values are open-textured

• There are no criteria that are both necessary and sufficient to establish whether a particular value has been correctly applied
• Deductive argument is invalid
• Coherentist approach is necessary, e.g. Reasoning by analogy
Formal model of moral argumentation (Brennan)

- rationale
  - moral concept
    - Paradigmatic positive cases
    - Case under investigation
    - Paradigmatic negative cases
Questions to be asked [1]

• What is (are) the ethical value(s) that seem to explain our initial judgment in this matter?
• If we are in doubt about its correct explication (What follows from our commitment to this value in this particular situation?), propose relevant cases where the explication is more straightforward
Questions to be asked (2)

• If doubt persists, propose a **rationale** for the moral value that seems to be at stake (answer to the question why it is important in the first place)
Steps in moral inquiry

• Moral perplexity
• Formulate moral hypothesis (‘this seems to be morally (in)appropriate since it is a specific instance of cases, classified by the moral value ABC’)
• Conduct moral inquiry (reasoning by analogy)
• Conclude by formulating a moral judgment (claim to support or challenge the truth of the initial moral hypothesis)
DBS in patients with minimal conscious state

• Demand on solidarity of the community justified?

• For instance because it:
  – Protects capabilities? (e.g., treatment of major depression)
  – Relieves suffering (e.g., sedation in patients with colorectal cancer)
  – Protects human dignity (e.g., treatment of drooling in children with cerebral palsy)
Normative inquiry in the context of HTA

- Attempt to conduct the inquiry in a more systematic way, while
- Clarifying the relation between facts and values, and
- Being more transparent and, therefore, open to public scrutiny
Reporting

• Who participated in the inquiry?
• What moral hypotheses were formulated?
• What analogous cases were used in order to clarify the issue?
• What rationale(s) were proposed? How did they affect the inquiry?
• Were initial hypotheses revised?
Overall objective

• Bringing values to bear on healthcare practices involving the use of healthcare technologies