Bioethics Grand Rounds

Co-sponsored by the Department of Bioethics & Humanities and the Ethics Advisory Committee at the University of Washington Medical Center

"Death’s Broker: Ethics Consultation in the ICU"

Monday, November 17, 2014
3:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Health Sciences Building, D209
Reception to follow

The greater part of the ethics consultant’s role in a hospital may best be understood as a process of helping to coordinate the progress of technical death and of bodily death in challenging ICU cases. This involves conducting a variety of interlocking negotiations, so that the two deaths occur at the same time, to the degree that is possible. As “death’s broker,” the consultant must be multi-lingual, in a rough-and-ready way. This is the case because so much of the negotiating the broker does takes place at the sticking point of medical languages, and their various sub-specialty dialects, with one another – and the sticking points of all that with family ways of speaking, themselves rooted in very particular and complex social and cultural settings.

David Schenck is an Assistant Professor with the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Society at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He is co-author with Larry R. Churchill of Healers: Extraordinary Clinicians at Work (Oxford University Press, 2011,) and its sequel (with Larry R. Churchill and Joseph B. Fanning) What Patients Teach: The Everyday Ethics of Healthcare (Oxford University Press, 2013). After twenty years as a professor of philosophy and religion, Schenck served as the founding executive director of a free medical clinic, as a counselor and healthcare advocate for the homeless, and as a consultant to community-based nonprofit organizations in the Southeast. He has volunteered and worked for many hospices over the last 25 years. Schenck has published in: Annals of Internal Medicine, Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics, Social Medicine Reader, Society, Journal British Society Phenomenology, Phenomenology and Philosophical Research, Soundings, Journal of Religious Ethics, International Philosophical Quarterly, International Studies in Philosophy, Human Studies.

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