


What is Health Care and Why Does it Matter?


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Dobbs overturns Roe

June 2022, Supreme Court ruled, in Dobbs versus Jackson Women's Health Organization, that the constitution does not guarantee the right to an abortion

Many nursing organizations voiced major opposition to the decision





Major nursing organizations confirm “Abortion is Health Care”

“The *Dobbs* ruling removes the right of all women to access high-quality health care and make personal decisions about their sexual and reproductive health care.”

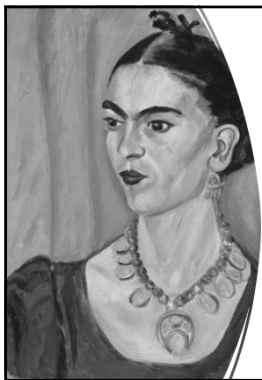
American Nurses Association



“Access to abortion is a key component of comprehensive reproductive healthcare.”

American College of Nurse Midwives





“Abortion is health care,” appears to function as something of an axiom


An axiom is “a self-evident or universally recognized truth”

Claim that abortion is health care is far from self-evident or universally recognized

Phrase however is certainly not self-evident

Depends on a very particular understanding of both “health” and “care”





Definition of health care is not incidental academic exercise

Definition gives decisive direction to what a nurse must, should, or should not do

Should nurses participate in various interventions that divide clinicians and bioethicists? (i.e., gender affirmative care, cosmetic surgery, euthanasia, and elective abortion)


Emerges from what the limits and scope of health care is

“Health” and “Care” central to nursing self-understanding

Nursing involves the promotion of health through the provision of care

Misunderstandings of these terms will lead nurses to misunderstand their obligations.

They can even come to participate in interventions that harm health and contradict care, thereby undermining the integrity of the nursing profession



Royal College of Nursing


Nursing is the use of clinical judgement in the provision of *care* to enable people to improve, maintain, or recover *health*, to cope with *health* problems, and to achieve the best possible quality of life whatever their disease or disability, until death

Two basic intuitions guide the conceptualization and definition of “health” “care”

Neither impulses named explicitly in formal nursing theory

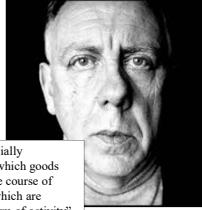
Exists incarnated in the day-to-day practice and discourse of nursing professional, academics, and leaders

Made clear by the discussions surrounding the question of elective abortions



Intuition #1: Health care is for *health*, objectively defined

Health care is a *practice* oriented toward an internal good, namely "health"



Practice: "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity"

Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue*

Different practices have different internal goods

Internal good of education, for example, is knowledge

Knowledge is realized when teachers seek to achieve the standards of excellence that are appropriate to the practice of teaching

Without pursuit of knowledge teaching loses its essence



Intuition #1 conceives of health care as a practice oriented toward internal good of "health"

Orientation to "health" is an intrinsic good that gives health care its own internal logic and makes the practice what it is intrinsically

Some extrinsic goods come from practicing health care (i.e., money) but do not make the practice what it is

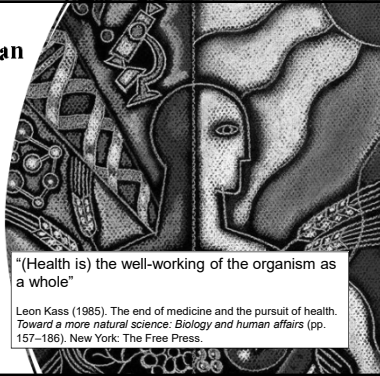
Pursuit of extrinsic goods interfere with the intrinsic good, the practice may be compromised



Intuition #1 would understand health as an inherently objective phenomenon

Health as an objective characteristic of living bodies when they are functioning well

Illness, by definition, involves a disruption of or deficit in this well-working



"(Health is) the well-working of the organism as a whole"

Leon Kass (1985). *The end of medicine and the pursuit of health. Toward a more natural science: Biology and human affairs* (pp. 157-186). New York: The Free Press.

Health care practitioner is a restorer

The role of health care practitioners is to cooperate in restoring the bodily well-working of the human organisms under their care

To do this well, the health care practitioner must exercise sound clinical judgment to discern which actions are conducive to health and which are not



Intuition #1 implies a specific obligation for nurses

To act, within the scope of their training and authority, in ways that enable people to maintain, improve, or recover the well-working (health) of the human body, and to help people cope with assaults to health so defined

Decline to damage or destroy the well-working (health) of the human body as a whole, even if the action in question serves some other worthy goal that are external to health

Various goals can be shared by nurses only insofar as pursuing them does not involve contradicting the nurse's commitment to the patient's health in the process.



Those following Intuition #1 would find "abortion is health care" incoherent

Pregnancy is the normal developmental result of unprotected heterosexual sex absent biological disfunction

Infant is the natural result of pregnancy absent some biological disfunction

Abortion appears to interfere with and interrupt the reproductive functions that partially constitute a woman's health



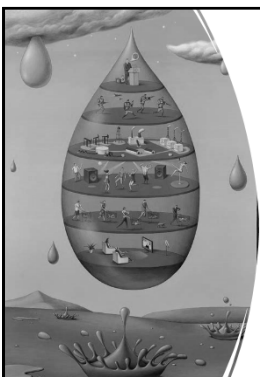
Vast majority abortions pursue external goods

Pursued to achieve other important goods such as education, career, money, or freedom



Logic clearly extends beyond abortion

One can see how the same logic might be applied to other contested interventions such as gender affirmation procedures, cosmetic surgery, and euthanasia.



Argument holds primarily regarding abortions that are *not performed* to save the life of the mother

97% of all abortions are not related to the preservation of maternal life, such an assumption can get us pretty far

One might hold that abortion is health care *just insofar* as the intervention is intended to preserve the woman's health and life from a grave threat and one has proportionate reason to accept the foreseen side effect of the death of the fetus.



Medicalized abortion may be necessary to prevent health complications for women

Even if elective abortions are outside of the scope of health care so conceived, people will as a matter of fact continue to seek abortion procedure

Procedures are not carried out by licensed health providers in regulated environments, some women will resort to "back-alley abortions" which gravely threaten their health



Acting contrary to health now to prevent potential future assault

An act contrary to a healthy pregnancy is undertaken to prevent a possible health care need in the future.

Acts directed against actual health for the sake of possible health

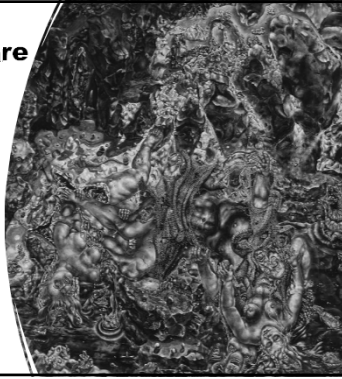
Incompatible with the model of health care we are here describing



Intuition #2: Health care is for “well-being”, as defined by the patient

Provider-of-services model

Well-functioning of the human body to be of primary concern if such functioning stood in the way of some patient-defined social or psychic vital goals.

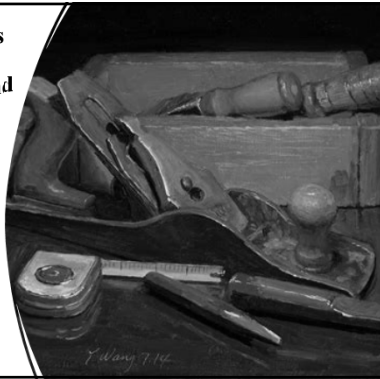


Health care professional is then understood to be the possessor of techniques and machinery

Professional is obligated to *provide* those services within scope of practice that the patient chooses in pursuit of the patient’s goals

services provided are limited only by what the law permits, what is technically feasible, and what the patient chooses

the health care practitioner is directed by the patient’s goals even if those goals appear to contradict the patient’s health objectively defined.

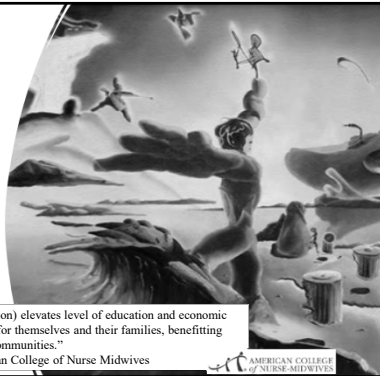


PSM model gives “Abortion as Health Care” intelligibility

Abortion is understood to be in many cases the best means by which a woman could meet her goals

Disruption of healthy and objectively functions of the human body is considered a secondary consideration

“(Abortion) elevates level of education and economic growth for themselves and their families, benefiting entire communities.”
American College of Nurse Midwives



These two intuitions are fundamentally different approaches to understanding the purposes of the health care

Can often result in the same or similar care decisions

Abortion lays bare these core differences

PSM, if consistently followed and broadly applied may lead the professional to break or otherwise make ill the body in the process of achieving some broader social and psychic purposes



Flourishing lives is a collaborative goal of a well-functioning society

Not the specific intrinsic goals of any specific institution or profession within that society

Society as a whole is working well when each profession uses its specific expert techniques and machinery to promote various genuine human goods intrinsic to that profession

Health is but one of these goods

When nurses set aside the patient's health as manifested in the well-working of the female productive system, they contradict their profession



Overextending their gaze health care professionals can become distracted

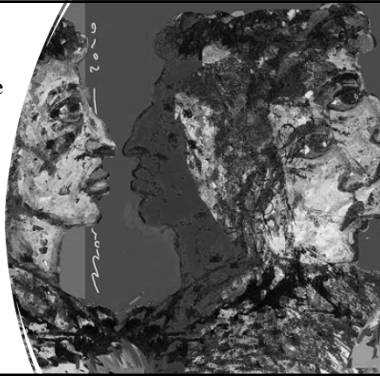
Risk becoming less proficient at the central intrinsic good of the profession

Certain hubris implicit in the belief that health care professionals should be the guarantors of all well-being and flourishing



Profession compromised when committed interventions that damage or destroy human health

Health care profession becomes alienated from the very good on which it is founded



Patient trust threatened when nurses focus on extrinsic goods

Healthcare techniques and machinery that can reap great good among patients but if misemployed can be of tremendous harm

Some of the greatest horrors in contemporary health care have been committed against patients when extrinsic goods valued above health



Discussion
