



Closing Keynote Lecture: “Should we give priority to children?”

Abstract

Clinicians often advocate for the distinctive needs of their patients. Many are tempted to claim that their patients deserve particular attention. That might be thought a form of special pleading, and in any case would conflict with the importance of equality. But perhaps some patient groups are deserving of priority. In particular, what weight should we give to paediatric patients? In this lecture, I will examine how, why and to what degree we should give priority to children. I start by identifying the problem of competing interests or claims, and provide a definition of priority in terms of giving greater weight to the claims or interests of children compared with others. Next, I identify different ethical reasons why children might plausibly receive priority. Third, I will review some priority questions linked to themes of the conference. How should we consider priority for paediatric research? How should we consider the priority of older children/adolescents (if we think children should have priority, does that alter with age)? How should we weigh the interests of child patients, compared with those of other family members?

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Biography

Dominic Wilkinson is Professor of Medical Ethics and Deputy Director of the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford. He is a consultant in newborn intensive care at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford and a senior research fellow at Jesus College Oxford.

Dominic has published more than 200 academic articles relating to ethical issues in intensive care for adults, children and newborn infants. His co-authored books include 'Pandemic Ethics: from COVID-19 to Disease X' (Oxford University Press 2023), 'Medical Ethics and Law, third edition' (Elsevier 2019); 'Ethics, Conflict and Medical treatment for children, from disagreement to dissensus' (Elsevier, 2018) (BMA President's Award in 2018 British Medical Association Book Awards). He is also the author of 'Death or Disability? The 'Carmentis Machine' and decision-making for critically ill children' (Oxford University Press 2013) ("the best book of the decade in bioethics... this is a book that must be read by everybody who is seriously interested in the bioethical issues that arise in neonatal intensive care or, more generally, in decision making for children with chronic, debilitating or life-threatening conditions." (John Lantos, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews). He was Editor and Associate Editor of the Journal of Medical Ethics from 2011-2018. Twitter: @Neonatalethics