Matthew Reyes

05/15/2022

Public Health 289 Interdisciplinary Seminar

1. Why do we need two principles, beneficence and respect for autonomy, to treat individuals with adequate concern for their interests? Make sure to include your definition of each in your answer, and give an example of each from the "Dollar-a-day” case.

Beneficence, which is the idea that an action be beneficial to the individual served, sometimes can be at odds with autonomy. Since autonomy is the right to self-determination and upholding of values through intentional decision making, free from coercion or influence, and with full understanding, we can imagine scenarios where these two principles have tension against one another. For example, acting with complete beneficence and disregard for autonomy may allow a physician to deceive or keep a patient ignorant of a treatment or care plan, but which will ultimately result in their good health. Because we hold personal autonomy in such high regard in our society, many would consider such a scenario unethical - the patient is lacking capacity for decision making or complete understanding, despite the net benefit afforded. In the Dollar-a-day situation, the principle of beneficence might be how Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood was trying to reduce secondary pregnancies in young, often poor women in Denver who would then face potentially insurmountable difficulties in escaping poverty. By preventing additional pregnancies, RMPP hoped to improve the lives of those women. However, personal autonomy was tread upon in this situation - RMPP created conditions of paternalism that changed the circumstances of the lives of these young women in such a way that they were maybe not entirely voluntarily or intentionally participating in the program, due to the financial and social reliance on the Dollar-a-day program.

2. Define and distinguish the following three increasingly intrusive forms of influence: persuasion, manipulation, coercion. Name a specific aspect of the "Dollar-a-day" intervention that you believe involves manipulation and say why.

Persuasive influence might be the actions of trusted figures that remove intention from an autonomous decision - rather than the individual coming to their decision free from bias or influence, they’ve been convinced in such a way that they wouldn’t otherwise come to the same decision. This is unique from manipulation - manipulative influence might withhold or provide biased information to the individual, such that their understanding is influenced, and thus their decision-making is without adequate knowledge to weigh risks and benefits. Finally, coercion would be distinct from each in that it removes a voluntary aspect of autonomy - the individual is no longer fully able to make a decision of their own due to outside pressure to pursue a specific decision. In the Dollar-a-day program, manipulation occurred when the participating women became reliant on the program for social aspects of community, especially when peer pressure changes the aspects of their lives that might otherwise have gone unmodified. Because the financial incentives existed and were significant for these women, the financial conditions manipulated their options so that they no longer had full autonomy in their reproductive choices.