

Bioethics Digest

In this feature, our team provides you with an overview of the most recent publications in the field of bioethics, with a particular focus on contributions coming from (or having relevance for) Switzerland.

Buona lettura! Bonne lecture ! Viel Spass beim Lesen! Enjoy the reading!

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CLINICAL ETHICS



“Association of medical futility with do-not-resuscitate (DNR) code status in hospitalised patients”

Patients suffering from in-hospital cardiac arrest (IHCA) may be saved by cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). However, the chances of survival are relatively small (about 20%), and survivors often suffer from permanent disability. Therefore, healthcare professionals should pre-emptively discuss with patients whether – in case of IHCA – they should attempt CPR or opt for a “Do not resuscitate” (DNR) status. Some clinicians might argue that CPR is futile for a specific patient. Becker et al. explore this topic by reviewing data from a hospital in Basel. Specifically, they retrospectively analyse patients’ records and calculate – by means of two validated clinical scores designed to predict medical futility – which patients had little chance of surviving an IHCA. They then look at how many of them were actually assigned a DNR status. Their findings raise some interesting ethical questions. First, 30% of patients for whom CPR would be futile according to scores and medical record did not have a DNR status. This suggests that such proportion of patient could undergo CPR despite its calculated futility – which is unjustified according to medico-ethical recommendations. Second, it was found that non-Christian and non-Swiss patients were more likely not to be assigned a DNR status despite their medical charts suggested CPR would be futile. This suggests that being from a “minority ethnicity is associated with preference for invasive medical procedures in end-of-life settings.”

Becker C, Manzelli A, Marti A, et al. Association of medical futility with do-not-resuscitate (DNR) code status in hospitalised patients. *Journal of Medical Ethics* Published Online First: 29 January 2021. doi: [10.1136/medethics-2020-106977](https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-106977)

RESEARCH ETHICS



“Research projects in human genetics in Switzerland: analysis of research protocols submitted to cantonal ethics committees in 2018”

What are the features of research projects involving genetic analysis in Switzerland? This article tackles this topic by presenting an analysis of all the protocol for such research submitted to Swiss ethics committee in 2018 (with particular attention to features of legal and ethical relevance). This investigation covers 122 project-protocols and produces several relevant findings. First, it reveals that many protocols lack detailed indications about genetic data storage. Second, it shows that there is a lot of inhomogeneity concerning the approach to the potential discovery of incidental findings during the project. That is “ranging from active communication [to the concerned participant, if incidental findings are discovered] to no such communication, or leaving the decision to the research participant”. Third, it suggests that the implementation of consent requirements is variable, and that projects rarely plan to offer genetic counselling to research participants for whom genetic data is used.

Driessen S, Gervasoni P. Research projects in human genetics in Switzerland: analysis of research protocols submitted to cantonal ethics committees in 2018. *Swiss Med Wkly*. 2021 Jan 17;151:w20403. doi: [10.4414/smw.2021.20403](https://doi.org/10.4414/smw.2021.20403).

TEACHING ETHICS



“Educating PhD Students in Research Integrity in Europe”

In their article, Abdi and colleagues bring to light how European universities teach research integrity to their early-career researchers. They do so by analysing teaching material of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) on research integrity. This association regroups 23 research-intensive universities including two Swiss institutions. Through inductive content analysis of all the material on research integrity provided by members of LERU, the authors provide a thorough overview of the similarities and differences in how research integrity is taught. They highlight, for example, that several institutions do not offer a university-wide research integrity education program. It is also noticed that research integrity courses are generally taught by in-house instructors. They also all share the idea that the pressure to publish is a threat to integrity. On the other side, it is noted that “some disagreement existed regarding unintentional plagiarism and self-plagiarism.” The article concludes with a few recommendations how to improve research integrity teaching practices, including the suggestion to implement minimum requirements for research integrity education for PhD students at a European level and to share available research integrity trainings between different universities.

Abdi S, Pizzolato D, Nemery B, et al. Educating PhD Students in Research Integrity in Europe. *Sci Eng Ethics* 27, 5 (2021). doi: [10.1007/s11948-021-00290-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-021-00290-0)