

# OR AT LEAST DO NO HARM

THE COMPLEXITIES OF PEDIATRIC HEALTHCARE ETHICS

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Associate Professor of Pediatrics, The George Washington University School of Medicine, and  
Health Sciences  
Washington, D.C.

04 APR 2024  
1020-1120

# PRESENTER

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## NAVY CMDR(RETIRED)THEOPHIL A. STOKES, M.D.



- Dr. Theophil Stokes is the Medical Director of Neonatology at Howard University Hospital in Washington, DC. He is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the George Washington University School of Medicine, and he is certified by the American Board of Pediatrics in General Pediatrics and Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine.
- Dr. Stokes retired from the United States Navy in 2022 after a distinguished twenty-year career as an active-duty Medical Corps officer. He was stationed at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda Maryland for the majority of career, where he served in a variety of leadership positions including Chief of Neonatology, President of the Medical Staff, and a member of the Walter Reed Board of Directors. He also served as Chair of the Healthcare Ethics and Provider Wellness Committees, and as the Associate Program Director for the Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine fellowship training program. In 2017 he was promoted to Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland.
- He earned his medical degree from Boston University's School of Medicine, where he was awarded a US Navy Health Professions Scholarship. He was commissioned as an active-duty Naval officer upon his graduation from medical school and completed his pediatric residency and neonatal-perinatal medicine fellowship at what is now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. In 2013 Dr. Stokes completed a Pediatric Bioethics Certificate program at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri.
- His academic interests are rooted in a belief that advanced communication skills are essential for doctors who work in emotionally charged environments like the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), and his work is aimed at better understanding and improving communication between NICU doctors and families.

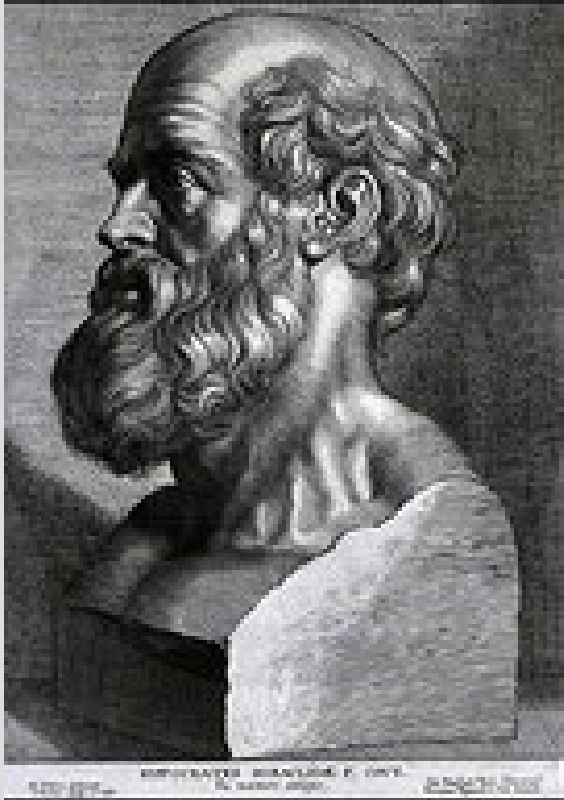
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# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Review the four main tenets of healthcare ethics: beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy.
2. Apply the four tenets to pediatric healthcare ethics, where surrogate decision-makers are typically involved.
3. Analyze ways in which an over-reliance on autonomy might make it harder to apply these ethical principles.

“IN THE DAYS OF THE IRON MAN...”



Make a habit of two things: to help; or at least to do no harm.

(Hippocrates)



Image included by T. Stokes

# The New York Times

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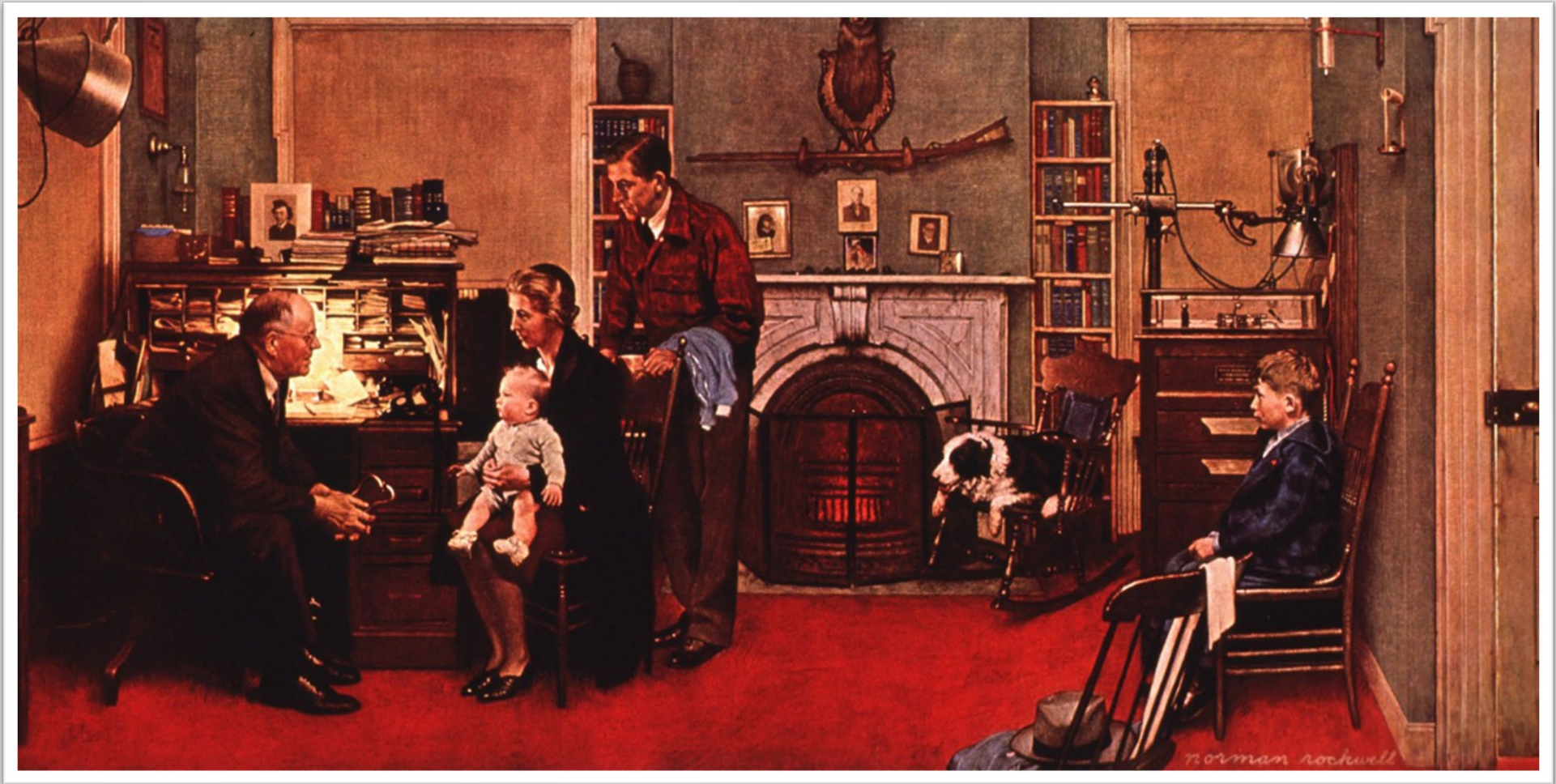
## *Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years*

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By JEAN HELLER  
The Associated Press





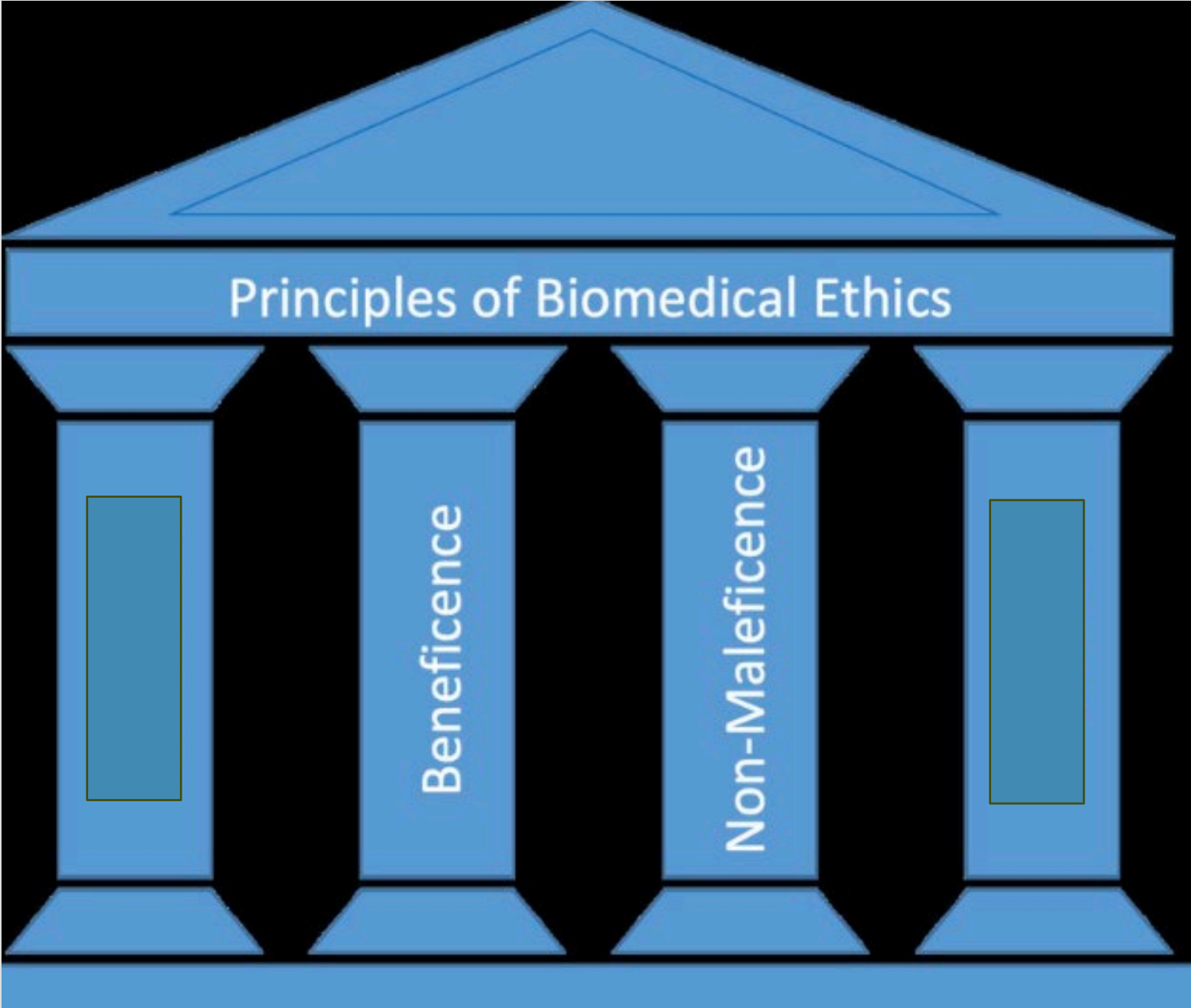


“Visiting the Family Doctor.” Norman Rockwell. 1947



Spirit of America 1974, Norman Rockwell





AUTONOMY: THE AMERICAN PRINCIPLE



**GIVE ME LIBERTY  
OR GIVE ME DEATH**

*- Patrick Henry, 1775*

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# AUTONOMY: THE AMERICAN PRINCIPLE



*"There will be a bit of a wait while we figure out a market solution to your problem."*

# AUTONOMY: THE AMERICAN PRINCIPLE







Deciding to resuscitate extremely premature babies: How do parents and neonatologists engage in the decision?

## ...the doctor

I give them the most neutral information possible so that they could make the decision as to whether they want their child to be given care or not. I really want it to be neutral...

Deciding to resuscitate extremely premature babies: How do parents and neonatologists engage in the decision?

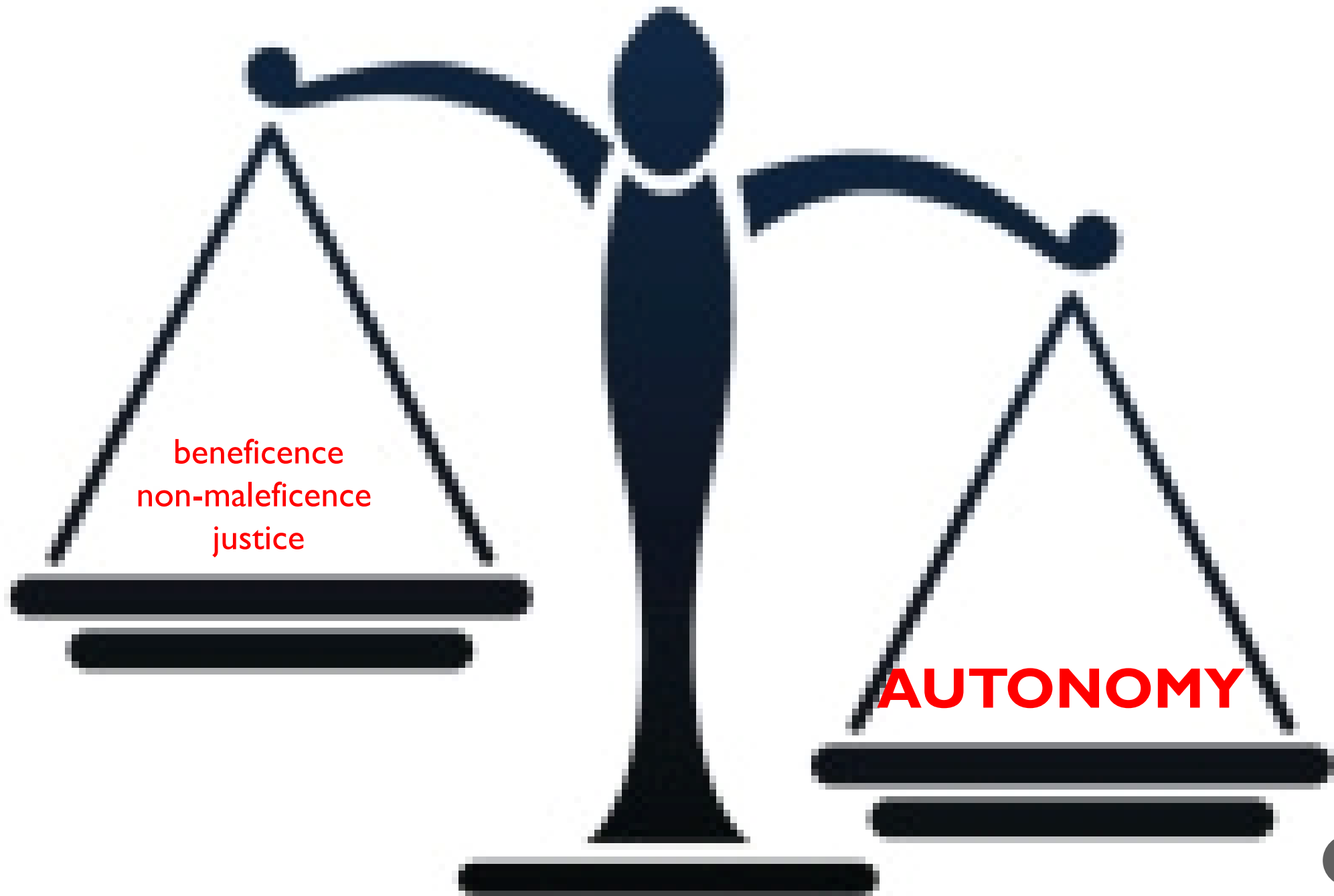
## ...the patient

The doctor comes, gives information and leaves, it's like there is no relationship, someone you could rely on. If you are ill, you need to rely on someone and say "help me". There, you don't want to say "help me" (...) he/she just comes, gives information and leaves.

# DOCTORING AS LEADERSHIP

*the power to heal*

efforts to strengthen patient autonomy inadvertently “harmed the patient-doctor relationship by causing physicians to shun care-taking or counseling behavior that can be interpreted as paternalism....



beneficence  
non-maleficence  
justice

**AUTONOMY**

← Back to Original Article

## Jahi McMath's mother insists brain-dead girl is 'not a corpse'



(Image property of T. Stokes)

A doctor told us that Jahi is “dead, dead, dead, dead” and that further medical care was no longer needed. They refer to her as “a body” or a “deceased person” instead of using her name

“They have not given me a reason yet of why she went into cardiac arrest. They haven’t even given me a reason for her bleeding. They haven’t given me a reason that they couldn’t stop the bleeding. The only thing they keep pushing for me is to get her off their ventilator.”

# CASE PRESENTATION

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Autonomy, justice, beneficence, and nonmaleficence are four commonly agreed upon ethical principles that can help guide ethical decisions in a healthcare setting. No one principle is more important than another, and their application should be applied thoughtfully and with an open-mind.
- An over-reliance on autonomy can be problematic for parents acting in the role of surrogate decision-maker for their child, who may desire guidance from their doctor on how best to proceed. Doctors should possess the communication and leadership skills to help in these instances.

## REFERENCES

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Payot, A., Gendron, S., Lefebvre, F., & Doucet, H. (2007). Deciding to resuscitate extremely premature babies: How do parents and neonatologists engage in the decision? *Social Science & Médecine*, 64(7), pgs. 1487-1500.

Schei, E. (2006). Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, 49(3). Summer 2006, pgs. 393-406



QUESTIONS?

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- 2024 APR CCSS: Evidence-Based and Promising Practices in Pediatric Care for Military Children and Youth
- Complete the course evaluation and posttest for the session(s) you attended by 11:59 PM ET on Thursday, April 18, 2024, to receive CE/CME credit or a certificate of attendance.
  - Log in to your account.
  - Go to the main event page and select the session you want to complete under the TAKE COURSE tab.
  - On the session page, click TAKE COURSE under the TAKE COURSE tab.
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