

How Good Do you have to be?

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Palliative care is based on a philosophy that acknowledges the inherent worth and dignity of each person and most practitioners will

with a family to obtain the treatment which should be their due in a health system with limited funds

The decision to opt for palliative care rather than a futile search for a cure can require considerable fortitude on the part of the clinician if they truly believe that option is right.

Temperance implies restraint or control in one's business or affairs. It can be synonymous with virtue itself. It is the virtue of doing well of knowing what we know and do not know and of modesty and self-control. In many ways this virtue is closely allied to beneficence. Beneficence implies positive acts and includes all the interpersonal and clinical strategies that health care professionals use to reduce suffering and promote well-being. Temperance may need to be employed to a greater extent as our resources become more and more stretched. The balance between benefits, effectiveness and burdens of all forms and manner of treatments are what is implied in the application of temperance.

The virtue of integrity represents two aspects of an individual. Firstly, an integration of aspects of the self-emotions, aspirations, knowledge etc. and secondly the trait of being faithful to moral values and standing up in their defence when they are threatened. Integrity defines who we are and it also integrates all the virtues. A person with integrity is someone who can judge the relative importance in each

situation of principles, rules and guidelines and so on in reaching a decision. It is a balanced relationship between physical, psychosocial, spiritual and intellectual elements of our lives. This could be a definition of what palliative care should be about.

The clinician/patient relationship relies on integrity and trust. Neither party must impose their values on the other. This virtue goes back to the ethics of personal responsibility, the most ancient branch of medicine, the ethic of character and virtue.

All of these virtues however need to be used in a balanced way. Ideally clinicians would attempt to utilise some or all of these virtues in order to provide an effective and caring service not just for people who are dying but for all those who seek the help of health care professionals.

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