

From the Editor

Meeting Challenges in the Best Way Towards the Best End

Ian D. Wolfe

ABSTRACT

Children with complex developmental and psychological needs present significant challenges within the institutional setting of the hospital. Many ethical questions arise from the interaction between these children and how hospitals are structured. Hospital policies that are structured for the “average” child, diagnoses, and lengths of stay often lead to challenges that may go unseen by clinicians, but are all-too-present for families. This issue of the *Journal of Pediatric Ethics* explores some of these spaces.

Children with complex developmental and psychological needs present significant challenges in hospitals where care is designed for neurotypical children. The pediatric mental health crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, shed light on just how unprepared many hospitals and health systems were to provide the best care and treatment for children who were not neurotypical. Clinicians found themselves providing good and safe care, but

often not what they would have considered the best treatment-focused care for these children. Often, providing safety was the best they could offer.

The challenge to provide the best possible care for these children persists. Many children with developmental and behavioral needs, and their families, find it difficult to access adequate services either for in-home or out-of-home care. For children who struggle with psychological issues, there can be delays to access the inpatient and outpatient services they need. Such delays can make the best disposition plan seem sub-optimal. Clinicians who care for children with complex psychological needs can find themselves wondering whether a child’s prolonged hospitalization in an acute care hospital while waiting for inpatient psychiatric care is worse than risking the safety issues that discharge back to home can present.

There are many complex dynamic issues at play. The mental health needs of children were increasing before the pandemic. Many children are affected by generational traumas that affect their families, which complicate the provision of care in and out of the hospital. Children with developmental needs are growing older,

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and their parents are growing older, too. At the same time, there are fewer resources to meet this growing need. Hospitals are often the safest places for these children, even if they aren't ideal.

Unfortunately, all of these factors lead to many burdens for children, families, and clinicians during their increasing experiences of

us from our readers or from the clinical practices of our editorial board members. These peer-reviewed case reviews and analyses are written by members of our editorial board and provide expert guidance on complex and difficult ethical questions in pediatrics.

The highlight of our journal is our "Family Voices" section. We solicit articles from parents

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moral distress, burnout, and care fatigue. All of these affect the care of these children and families and present ethically complex questions about their best care.

This issue of the *Journal of Pediatric Ethics* explores various aspects of the issue of caring for children with complex developmental and psychological needs. Our feature article explores two cases of children who have complex psychological needs whose parents also seem to suffer the effects of mental illness, generational trauma, and racism. The authors explore considerations around parental capacity, and through their analysis provide guidance for other clinicians.

In the clinical review article of this issue of the journal, the author presents the case of a child who has avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder. This complex psychological issue, similar to children with conversion and factitious disorders, presents many challenges for clinicians. The author takes us through the case and demonstrates how taking a harm-reduction approach can be pragmatic in the absence of better alternatives.

This issue will present a new feature for the journal, the "Ask the Ethicist" column. This feature takes ethical questions that are presented to

and families, assist them in editing, and then have their narratives peer reviewed. We welcome unsolicited narrative submissions. In this issue of the journal we present two parent narratives that describe the experience of navigating care for children with complex developmental needs.

We hope these articles add to the conversation that is needed around how we care for these children as best as we can, given the limitations we currently have. They will, hopefully, add to the conversation around how we can improve our interactions with these children and their families to provide the best care possible. We will always face new challenges in non-ideal situations; how we go forward in the best way towards the best end will have the greatest impact.