

Genetics in medicine: An ethics curriculum

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The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists, is piloting a project consisting of a seminar series for medical genetics trainees across Canada (TeleGRAF: Telehealth for Genetics Residents And Fellows).

This national initiative strives to capitalize on the expertise of subspecialists in the field of Medical Genetics in hope of enriching the educational experience of all Medical Genetics trainees. Bioethics education has been recognized as an essential component of this program. This curriculum has been designed to incorporate bioethics teaching as an integral part of the TeleGRAF seminar series.

Each month, a 1-hour lecture is given to trainees across Canada using telehealth conferencing. One lecture per year is devoted to a topic in bioethics and genetics. Recognizing that a 1-hour lecture is suboptimal in teaching bioethics, the curriculum is modular based and incorporates various other learning activities, such as case discussions, self-reflection exercises, role play, video analysis and student presentations.

The success of this curriculum requires the involvement of engaged mentors in each centre who will facilitate this program for residents and fellows throughout their training. By incorporating ethics teaching in this fashion and encouraging ongoing dialogue between trainees and faculty, trainees will learn to identify ethical issues and will be challenged to critically analyze the issues as they arise. As a national program this curriculum benefits from the experiences of colleagues practicing in various milieus but also addresses regional learning needs and/or clinical practices. We hope that this model of bioethics teaching can be used by similar training programs.