Introduction

Major advances in medical technology, increased expectations, and changing moral attitudes have combined to generate many complex ethical and legal problems in the fields related to palliative care. Those who care for patients with life-threatening illnesses can face particularly pressing and difficult moral choices. The course provides an opportunity to gain a deeper and more systematic understanding of these issues, and to explore the moral problems health care professionals working in these areas may face.

Teaching is delivered in short intense blocks, enabling those in full-time employment to do the course part time and fit it around the demands of their work wherever they are based.

The course is taught in Liverpool by lecturers from Keele University’s Centre for Professional Ethics (PEAK) and the clinical and academic members of the Marie Curie Palliative Care Institute, Liverpool. From time to time, law lecturers from Keele University may provide specialist input, and external expert speakers may also be invited to speak on the course. This is an exciting joint venture uniting academic and practical clinical expertise.

We regard high levels of student participation in discussion as particularly important for teaching and learning in this area, and employ teaching techniques which encourage this wherever possible. Students come from a diverse range of geographic locations and backgrounds within the field of health care. Past and current students have reported that meeting and exchanging ideas with others who work in different fields and in different parts of the country is one of the major benefits of the course.

The Medical Ethics and Palliative Care teaching team has many years experience of teaching postgraduate applied ethics courses. We are well aware of the special problems and challenges which may face mature students and those combining study with full-time work, and therefore we do our utmost to offer a supportive and stimulating environment for learning. Each student is assigned a personal supervisor from the teaching team, whom they can contact for help or advice at any time during the course.

Aims of the Course

This course aims to deepen students’ understanding of healthcare ethics that are particularly relevant to the fields related to palliative care, and to enhance their ability to think systematically about the moral issues that healthcare professionals may face in the course of their work. It also aims to provide a foundation for pursuing further study at doctoral level for those interested in doing so.

Intercalation

Students studying medicine can opt to take a year out of their undergraduate medical studies in order to study a subject area in greater depth, before returning to complete the medical course. Intercalating students would take the MA in Medical Ethics and Palliative Care as full time students to ensure that the course is completed within one year.

Entry Requirements

The course is open to all those with either a degree in a relevant subject, or appropriate professional qualifications and / or experience. Applications are welcome from people with a professional or other serious interest in the medical ethics and palliative care, including (but not limited to) doctors, nurses, health care managers, intercalating medical students, radiographers, chaplains, charity and voluntary workers, social workers, hospice directors, medical and pharmaceutical researchers, and health care educators.

Funding

In previous years a number of students on our courses have managed to obtain full or partial funding from their employers. The value of training in this area is increasingly recognised by employers, and the opportunity to undertake a detailed examination of a particular area in healthcare ethics could be very beneficial to the organisation.

Contact Details

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### Year 1

**Teaching occurs in four three-day modules that run between September and April. This innovative structure has proved particularly popular with health care professionals in full-time employment as it allows students to combine study with full time work, and family and other commitments. It also enables students who are based in all areas of the UK and beyond to attend.**

**Assessment:**
Each module is assessed by an essay of 4000 words. All modules must be passed in order to proceed to the dissertation.

**Awards**
Successful completion of the four taught modules will lead to the award of a Postgraduate Diploma.

### Introduction to Ethics and Palliative Care

In this module, you are introduced to the main concepts and theories used in health care ethics. This is done in a number of ways that bring out their connection with issues of practical concern in palliative care. Additionally, Module 1 normally contains topics such as: the shift from curative to palliative care; the context of care (e.g. hospital, hospice, home); the relationship between ethical and clinical considerations.

### Autonomy, Paternalism and Advance Care Planning

Module 2 addresses issues within palliative care which relate to respect for the autonomy of patients and carers and for issues that arise over advance care planning. Important topics normally include: truth-telling; confidentiality; decision-making for the seriously ill patient; informed consent; consent and the law; advance directives; paternalism; challenges of non-malignant diseases; and the nature and role of hope in palliative care.

### Ethical Issues in Care of the Dying

This module focuses on end-of-life issues and care for the dying. It includes topics on the significance of death; the sanctity and value of life; the idea of ‘quality of life’; withdrawing and withholding life-prolonging treatment; and ethical and legal issues in euthanasia. The practical aspects of care for the dying are also addressed through a focus on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

### Policy, Resource and Research Ethics in Palliative Care

The content of this module varies from year to year to reflect current issues of particular concern in the field. However, central to controversies in palliative care are issues of policy, resource allocation and research, which form the central core of the module. In recent years, it has also included seminars on special issues relating to the care of children; screening programmes; the role of religious belief in ethical debate; and differing conceptions of palliative care.

### Year 1/2

**Part-time students in their second year, or full-time students in their first, will have the opportunity to complete a 15000-20000 word research dissertation on a topic of their choice.**

The dissertation gives the students a chance to intensively engage with a topic of their choice.

**Awards**
Successful completion of the award of the Masters Degree in Medical Ethics.

### Research Dissertation

The dissertation gives students a chance to undertake a more intensive piece of work (between 15000 and 20000 words) on a topic of interest to them. While working on the dissertation students will have a supervisor to provide support and advice during the writing process. Dissertation topics are chosen by the student themselves and must relate to an issue within the broad area of healthcare law or ethics.

Some students start the course with a clear idea about what they want to write about - often an ethical issue from within their own practice - but others find and develop particular interests as the course progresses and they learn more about ethical theory, so don't worry if you have no clear idea what to write about prior to entering the programme. The list on the opposite column gives some guidance as to the kinds of issues that have been explored by our past students. If there is a particular area you wish to write about, and would like to discuss this prior to applying for the diploma year, please contact us.

The School offers an excellent intellectual environment for postgraduate research and is committed to providing the most appropriate infrastructure for study.

### Past Dissertation Topics

The following is a far-from exhaustive list of topics that past students have addressed in their dissertations:

- "Do Not Resuscitate" orders;
- Patient autonomy and end-of-life decisions;
- Withdrawal of life-prolonging treatment;
- Futility and ethical issues;
- Truth telling and deception;
- Terminal sedation;
- Euthanasia / assisting in bringing about death;
- Concepts of a good death;
- The doctrine of double effect;
- Resource allocation and palliative care;
- Faith and spirituality in palliative care;

If there is a particular area you wish to write about, and would like to discuss this prior to applying for the diploma year, please do not hesitate to contact us.