The Bioethics Bulletin

Oct. 22, 2026

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32nd Annual Rosemary Flanigan Lecture

Healthcare in an Era of Mass Deportation: Values, Ethics, and Narratives

As mass deportation reshapes the landscape of American healthcare, doctors, nurses, and institutions face an urgent question: what do we owe the communities we serve when policy and professional duty collide?

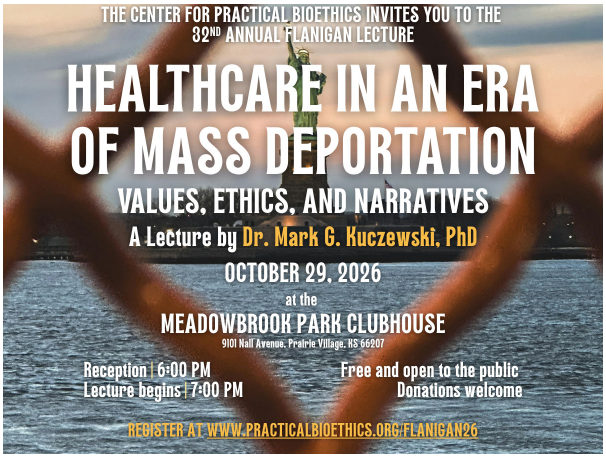
October 29, 2026

Attend in person
OR via livestream

Reception 6:00 PM
Lecture Begins at 7:00 PM

The Meadowbrook Park Clubhouse
Prairie Village, KS

Free and Open to the Public
Donations Welcome



Join us with Mark Kuczewski, PhD, to explore how the healing professions' core commitment to human dignity is being tested — and what's at stake for patients, providers, and the values that define medicine itself.

Dr. Kuczewski created the Sanctuary Doctoring program to provide resources to physicians to support their immigrant patients. He was also the catalyst for Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine becoming the first medical school in the nation to welcome applications from DACA recipients.

REGISTER NOW

Clinical Ethics Resources

The Ethics Dispatch

The *Ethics Dispatch* newsletter is a benefit we provide partner organizations and to all in the Bulletin. For information about how your organization can receive all the benefits of partnership, please contact Cassandra Shaffer Johnson at cshafferjohnson@PracticalBioethics.org

When Advanced Dementia Turns Aggressive:

Protecting Patients and Caregivers

Anyone who has spent time around a person with advanced dementia knows that the disease can be heartbreaking, unpredictable and, at times, frightening. How should caregivers respond when a patient becomes dangerous? In this issue's Hot Topic and Case Study, we consider how we can create healthcare systems that protect both patients and caregivers.

Ethical Musings digs into new approaches needed to meet increasing demands on the healthcare system by people with cognitive decline, Alzheimer's and related conditions.

READ THE DISPATCH

ECC Tackles Challenging Discharges

Why the Increase? What ethics committees can do about it.

The Ethics Committee Consortium meeting on October 6 focused on challenging discharges. Here's a glance at what was discussed.

- **Why they are increasing** – growing patient complexity, limited placement options, fragmented systems of care, behavioral health needs, financial and insurance barriers, and particular issues facing vulnerable patient populations.
- **Categories of ethical challenges** – *autonomy-related concerns*, when a patient rejects a recommended discharge plan, and *distributive justice concerns*, when limited resources or placement options affect what can realistically be offered.
- **Related topics** – the meaning of a "safe" discharge, the dignity of risk, paternalism, shared and deliberative decision-making, balancing autonomy with beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice, and the role ethics committees and consultants can play in supporting patients, families, and care teams through these difficult situations.

Conversation also highlighted the moral distress challenging discharges can create for healthcare professionals and the value of ethics education and support for frontline staff navigating these cases.

For information about partnership with the Center and the ECC, contact Cassandra Shaffer Johnson at cshafferjohnson@PracticalBioethics.org.

Hospitals Are Suing Patients for Unpaid Medical Bills

What Makes Healthcare Different from Any Other Business Transaction

Kansas City-area hospitals have sued hundreds of patients over medical debt this year, according to an informal review of court records conducted by *The Beacon*, a regional, nonprofit digital news network focused on public-service journalism in Kansas and Missouri.

Hospitals with nonprofit status are obligated to determine whether patients are eligible for financial assistance before taking them to court, several lawyers told Suzanne King at *The Beacon.* But that's not

always happening locally, with some hospitals more litigious than others. Furthermore, as new Medicaid requirements take effect next year and private health plans become less affordable, thousands of people in Missouri and Kansas are expected to lose coverage.

READ NOW

Asked to weigh in on the problem, the Center's Ryan Pferdehirt identified the commoditization of healthcare – treating it as any other business transaction – at the heart of what needs reform.

"When the patients are customers and the providers are providing a service, it's just a contract," he said.

When Medical AI Works Well

CPB Board Member Has Some Ethical Questions

Much of our ethical and regulatory focus on medical AI is on how to prevent it from going wrong.

CPB Board Member Inmaculada de Melo-Martin's October 13 article in The Hastings Center for Bioethics newsletter – *When Medical AI Works Well: Some Ethical Questions* – believes these concerns are crucial but explains why some of the most important consequences of medical AI may emerge when it works as intended.

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Screening Bioethics – EPISODE 3 REVIEW

Popular Depictions of Breast Cancer and Breast Cancer Risk

Episode 3 of *Screening Bioethics*, moderated by Francis Co-Chair Kayhan Parsi, was candid, honest, and at times even humorous. In this episode, three women shared their experiences with breast cancer risk and/or diagnoses through the lens of popular culture.

WATCH EPISODE 3

Viewing clips from *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*, *In the Family*, and Tig Notaro's 2015 comedy special, they reflected on their relationships, their bodies, their feeling about treatment options offered, and even their identities.

Nanette Elster, Francis Co-Chair at the Center, spoke about her experience in choosing a bilateral prophylactic mastectomy. Filmmaker Joanna Rudnick, who tested positive for the breast cancer gene at age 27 and was later diagnosed with breast cancer, shared her experiences in the 2008 documentary, *In the Family*. She reflected on how much has changed and not changed nearly 20 years later. Cara Texler, a physician, shared what it was like to journey through an uncertain possible breast cancer diagnosis to ultimately have a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy.

Stay tuned for details about Episode 4 coming in December.

Who's Who at CPB

Ryan Pferdehirt, D.Bioethics, HEC-C

Ryan Pferdehirt is the Vice President of Ethics Services and holds the Rosemary Flanigan Chair at the Center for Practical Bioethics. He is also an Instructor of Bioethics at Kansas City University. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Ryan joined the Center in 2019 after building an ethics department and integrating ethics into everyday patient care for 11 hospitals in the MultiCare Health System in Tacoma, Washington.

At the Center, Ryan works with hospitals, hospices, health systems and clinical associations nationwide in developing ethics committees and departments, providing clinical ethics consultations and policy guidance, and expanding knowledge and application of practical bioethics to healthcare's most complex ethical issues.

What I'm….

Listening to: I really enjoy jazz and downtempo electronic. Paul Chambers, Bill Evans, and John Coltrane are always playing in the background, but I also really enjoy Nora En Pure, Lemon Jelly, and Odesza.

Wanting to visit: I have always wanted to visit Japan, particularly Kyoto. I would love to spend quiet time in a Buddhist temple. But besides that, I am looking forward to the next beach trip with my family.

Reading: Right now, I'm reading *The Methods of Ethics* by Henry Sidgwick, *The Patient as Agent of Health and Health Care* by Mark D. Sullivan, *Assyria: The Rise and Fall of the World's Fires Empire* by Eckart Frahm, and *Psychotherapy East & West* by Alan Watts. I often read several books at the same time but from different genres. And I always have a copy the latest issue of the "Philosophical Review" on my nightstand.

Watching: I am a pretty big sports fan. I'm getting excited about the baseball playoffs, even though my beloved Pittsburgh Pirates did not make it again this year. Soccer and football at just starting, and looking forward to the start of the hockey season.

Doing for Exercise: I am always moving because of my kids. We play outside a lot, so I am constantly throwing baseball and football, shooting basketball, etc. But I always try to make it to my home gym daily.

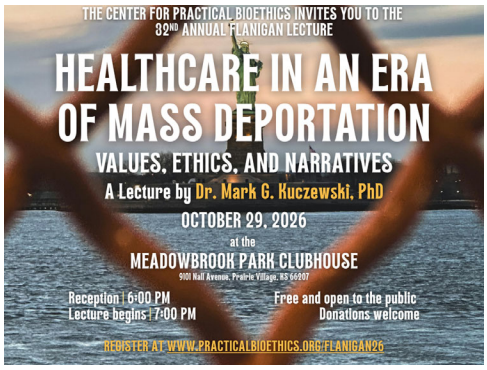
Worrying about: My dishwasher, refrigerator, or some other large appliance needing to be replaced. I also worry about my children, normal dad behavior.

Wishing for: I have been very excited and encouraged by the amazing work everyone has done this past year at the Center. I am wishing for that to continue.

Save the Dates - *click on the logo to read more*

Rosemary Flanigan Lecture

32nd Annual Free Public Reception and Lecture
Healthcare in an Era of Mass Deportation: Values, Ethics, and Narratives



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October 29, 2026
6:00 PM Reception, 7:00 PM Lecture
Meadowbrook Park Clubhouse,
Prairie Village, KS

Guest Lecturer: Mark G. Kuczewski, PhD, HEC-C

Screening Bioethics – EPISODE 4

Free webinar series exploring bioethics topics in the popular media

December Program TBD | 6:00 -7:00 PM CT

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