

SaskEthics

An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan

In minimis perfectio

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



It's not every day that I headline *SaskEthics* with a Latin phrase, but this one felt particularly important. This phrase, "*in minimis perfectio*," was the motto of the Grey Nuns School of Nursing in Saskatoon, directing nursing students to be "perfect even in little things." The motto continues to be a reminder for all of us of the importance of developing good habits even during seemingly unimportant moments of our day.

The process of forming good habits is connected to an area of ethics called virtue ethics, which owes much of its development to the Greek philosopher Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Virtue ethics explains that there are virtues that we all want to embody, such as patience, courage and honesty. However, it is difficult to live these virtues perfectly. While trying to be courageous, for example, we can miss the mark and act either recklessly or cowardly. Virtue ethics is often compared to trying to shoot

an arrow at a target. It takes a lot of practice to hit a bullseye!

Virtue ethics is particularly important in healthcare because, although healthcare is rooted in science, the practice of healthcare is more of an art. So many moments in our days require us to find the right balance. Am I being impatient if I phone to see when the consult team is coming to see my patient, or too lax if I don't pick up the phone right now? Am I striking the right balance in cleaning this patient's room without being sloppy, or taking too much time that could be spent doing something else? Answering these questions requires personal discernment and support from experienced colleagues.

For example, consider a nurse whose day is so full that she finds herself rushing through a bedside bath with a patient. She notices that her patient is tense, and it occurs to her that she can't remember asking if the water felt warm enough when she started. The ideal she held herself to as a new grad – doing her best to comfort her patients – is slipping away in the busyness of acute care. How can she grow in the virtues of diligence and caring to better support her patients?

One way she might reclaim her skills is to habitually pause care after the first few steps to always ensure her patient is okay. Like a waiter asking, “how are the first few bites tasting?” this check-in will often be waved off. However, there will also be many moments when a patient may express a need that leads to a drastic improvement in care.

In addition to improving care, striving for perfection in small things also develops good habits which will serve us in bigger moments. Pausing to ensure a bath is going well may seem minor, but knowing how to pause respectfully is the type of

habit that may prove critical when we see that someone is agitated or realize that a procedure is not being carried out safely.

Which virtues do you value? Which ones do you and your team need to work on? How might you work on them together?

For more inspiration on “being perfect even in little things,” consider exploring St. Therese of Lisieux, a Catholic saint with a powerful story.

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Holiday Reminder

Are you at work while your colleagues are on vacation?

Would you like to increase your Ethics knowledge?

**Don't forget that all past Ethics Exchanges are available
online at:**

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/intranet/departments-programs/quality-safety-and-information/insights-better-health/ethics/ethics-exchangeeducation>

