

BEING TRUSTWORTHY IN TODAY'S MEDICAL WORLD

Nancy Nyquist Potter, Ph.D.

Outline

I. The problem

II. What trust is

III. Trustworthiness: The virtue

IV. Contexts and cases

V. Broken trust

VI. Discussion

Marie Hernandez shows up regularly in Dr. A's office. Marie can't decide which recommendations of Dr. A's to take; she wants to be told what to do. She calls with follow-up questions wanting to know if she is doing the right thing. Then she makes another appointment. Dr. *A can't stand* this patient. Dr. A is certain she has a dependent personality—probably a personality disorder—and dreads every encounter more than the last. She just doesn't have time for Marie's neediness.

Trust and Trustworthiness as Counterparts

I give my trust to you about ...





Trust and Time

Moral trust is relational.
This takes time.

Who has this 'time'?

Being worthy of another's
trust

Trusting someone who is not
trustworthy is
A Bad Idea



Defining trust

You trust your friend/co-worker/family member *to take care of something you value*

because *you* value it



Attitudes about Advance Directives

I don't need my patient's opinion to withdraw treatment [...] if I think that the patient shouldn't be resuscitated, that she has no chance, I don't need her opinion for this.



Trustworthiness as a virtue

The sort of person you are

Over time

Character

Readiness



A trustworthy person is...

...a person who can be counted on, as a matter of the sort of person she or he is, to take care of those things others entrust to her or him.



Virtues have extremes and an intermediate

Deficiency: not taking care of what others value, only being trustworthy to select people, being quick to betray

Excess: remaining loyal to a party regardless of what they have done; keeping confidences that could seriously harm others; being unwilling ever to betray someone

The intermediate

...at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue. (Aristotle 1999, 1106b17-25)

Trustworthy to this person about this particular thing she values

Who places their trust in health care workers?

Patients

Families

Staff

Other doctors

The clinic or hospital

The institution of medicine

What if you just don't have
time to develop trusting
relations with all these
people?!

What if no one is entrusting
you to take care of something
they value?

Why still be trustworthy?



Reasons to be trustworthy

Good in itself

but also

Good because it is necessary for
eudaimonia

We cannot fully flourish without having and using the virtues.

- Rewarding (positive pleasure)
- Strengthen our reasoning abilities
- Affirm our humanity
- Facilitate a good, strong, healthy society

Is being trustworthy relevant
in a case like this?

31-year-old male victim of a
motorcycle accident is brought to the
emergency room.

Unconscious, severe head injury

No contact information

Mandatory Parental Notification

Fifty-nine percent of teenage girls indicated they would stop using all sexual health care services, delay testing or treatment for HIV or other STDs, or discontinue use of specific (but not all) sexual health care services if their parents were informed that they were seeking prescribed contraceptives.

Sheila is 14 years old. She has come to you seeking contraception. Sheila lives with a single mom who is Christian and her mom's verbally abusive boyfriend. Sheila's been sexually active since she was 13. She is pretty sure Mom will just kick her out if Mom finds out she is having sex. Her dad is not an option to live with.



Individual trust and
institutional trust are integrally
bound up

Being trustworthy and professional ethics

II. A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions, and strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence, or engaging in fraud or deception, to appropriate entities.

- Bill, resident in Internal Medicine
- Inadequate medical knowledge, errors
- Amber and other residents check up on him
- Sarah thinks they are covering for Bill's mistakes
- Hospital administration and attendings know of the problem
- 'Good teamwork;' no one wants to fail him
- With no failing evaluations, hospital cannot fire Bill



Broken Trust

Ideally:

- Seek out that person

- Explain

- Seek forgiveness

When unable:

- Prepare for future times

- Talk through similar cases with others

- Make institutional changes

References

American Medical Association Code of Medical Ethics,
<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/medical-ethics/code-medical-ethics.page>
accessed 31 August 2014.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed. Trans. T. Irwin. Hackett, 1999.

Horn, R. *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* 2014, 17: 425-435.

Potter, NN. *How Can I Be Trusted?* Rowman-Littlefield 2002.

Reddy, D., Fleming, R., Swain, C. Effect of Mandatory Parental Notification on Adolescent Girls' Use of Sexual Health Care Services, *JAMA* 2002, 288(6).

Nancy Nyquist Potter
Professor, Philosophy

Core faculty, Interdisciplinary Masters in Bioethics and Medical
Humanities

Affiliated Scholar, Division of Medical Humanism and Ethics, Med School

nancy.potter@louisville.edu