

The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Ethics for Lunch Series

Topic: Jehovah's Witness Faith Perspectives on Blood Transfusion

Date: December 20, 2022

Panelists: Ashly Nealon, John Johnson, Emily Johnson, Ish'shah Sherd

Facilitator: Ty Crowe

The Ethics for Lunch, December 2022, focused on patients who identify as Jehovah's Witness (JW) and may struggle to maintain their faith during serious illness and situations that could benefit from blood products. The discussion highlighted the Bloodless Medicine Program at JHH and the many ways support is offered to both patients and families who are JW. The Center for Bloodless Medicine and Surgery also identified ways in which they support medical teams in the hospital.

The panelists discussed the case of a young adult who found both solace and comfort in their JW faith and faith practices. In this case, the patient's wishes about not receiving blood products were well communicated. The patient's health declined, and she later died. However, the care team expressed fear, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness as they believed that the patient's life could have been saved if she had received a blood transfusion. The case highlighted the challenges that occur when the obligation to offer standardized medical interventions runs counter to respecting a patient's faith and honoring religious beliefs.

Recommendations:

- 1) Chaplains often enhance the medical teams' understanding of the importance of a patient's faith and the impact of their faith on medical care and treatments.
- 2) Chaplains can be helpful in identifying religious resources, including other groups for spiritual support.
- 3) The Center for Bloodless Medicine and Surgery is active at JHH and can be helpful in identifying options for care that support Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 4) JHH Spiritual Care also has an active JW volunteer group that offers supportive conversation and prayer for patients who identify as JW upon admission.
- 5) When situations arise that create tension for medical teams, especially when it involves treatment decisions for Jehovah's Witnesses that could include death as an outcome, those team members can reach out to JHH chaplains, JW volunteers, or the Bloodless Medicine Program Director for support and insight.
- 6) Center for Bloodless Medicine and Surgery; Pager: 410-283-2808; Phone: 877-474-8558 or https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/bloodless_medicine_surgery/

References:

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3. [Frank SM, Wick EC, Dezern AE, et al](#). Risk-adjusted clinical outcomes in patients enrolled in a bloodless program. *Transfusion*. 2014; 54:2668-77. PMID: 24942198.

4. [Resar LMS, Wick E, Almasri TN, Dackiw E, Ness P, Frank S](#). Bloodless medicine: current strategies and emerging treatment paradigms. *Transfusion*; 2016; 56:2637-47.
5. [Chaturvedi S, Koo M, Dackiw L, Koo G, Frank SM, Resar LMS](#). Preoperative treatment of anemia and outcomes in surgical Jehovah's Witness patients. *Am J Hematol*. 2019 Feb;94(2): E55-E58. Epub 2018 Dec 18. PubMed PMID: 30474135.