

Attitudes toward Finitude

Yvonne Denier (2008), of the Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law, believes that the topic of scarcity is a necessary discussion related to healthcare reform to manage the supply of healthcare services in a way that matches consumer demand. While the concept of scarcity is widely discussed, she warns that the precise definition of scarcity is not always understood. She believes that scarcity should be seen as an economic outcome of not recognizing "finitude" (Denier, 2008, p. 73), or the finite nature of one's life. This scarcity forces the prioritization of available choices related to the use and allocation of resources creating a "trade off" (Denier, 2008, p. 75) among the various options available to patients.

An economic problem exists, in that unlimited demand by healthcare consumers must compete with limited resources (Robinson and Ginsburg, 2009). Unlimited demand is created when reimbursement for healthcare services is provided by an entity other than the person receiving the services. As insurance is introduced into the consumption equation, the tendency for people to spend money held by others is exhibited. When the expenditure for healthcare does not immediately affect the consumer, the demand for services increases. Under Denier's call for a recognition of finitude, it seems that consumers, when insulated by the payment of services by a third-party, do not have an impetus for recognizing the finite nature of health and life, absent the lack of funds to defy their finitude.

Denier's (2008) approach toward healthcare scarcity through the notion of finitude relies on an adjustment of societal member's attitude regarding the finite nature of life. Our society has adopted a view that restrictions placed upon an individual's activities, movement, and independence is to be avoided, or at a minimum, delayed until the last possible days of life. Society does not embrace, from Denier's (2008) perspective, the idea that life will encounter periods of declining health, and that decline should be accepted as inevitable without the attempt to change the prospect of illness or fatality through the provision of healthcare services. In other words, people fail to recognize the necessary process of preparing for one's eventual demise. She warns that we can no longer ignore the prospect of scarcity, and through a change in which society reconsiders its belief related to finitude, the problem of scarcity and healthcare can be resolved.

The causes of scarcity are multi-factorial, with the main causes cited as the high cost of technology, changes in patient demographics, and the need for greater efficiency. As new technology is developed and new discoveries of science are made, additional demand for services that improve or maintain health status, are created (Denier, 2008). A false sense of reality is gained by the consumer in assuming technology and science hold the solution for future health improvement, in ways that are affordable and available to all (Denier, 2008).

The political approach used by legislators, in the dialogue of healthcare reform, implies that healthcare scarcity is caused by the inefficient manner in which healthcare is provided,

rather than unchecked consumer demand based on unrealistic attitudes toward the finiteness of life (Denier, 2008).

The gap between demand for healthcare and available supply creates for Denier (2008), a "self-inducing and self-increasing process" (p. 76). Health becomes the right of all without limitations placed on supply. Denier (2008) calls this the "medicalisation of life" (p. 76) as an intense focus by members of society to expect all means available toward the betterment of life. This medicine-oriented belief in a better future, fuels demand for genetic research, technological advancements, and new applications of science in a way that Denier (2008) believes approaches the belief structure of a religion. A drive for efficiency and greater effectiveness of the existing healthcare resources must be recognized as important to the challenge of protecting healthcare resources, but for Denier (2008), greater efficiency and effectiveness will not eliminate the existence of scarcity and the necessity of rationing. The power of consumer expectations will be a deciding force in society's ability to control health care utilization.

References:

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