

Issues in Biomedical Science

Some lessons learnt

A photograph of a lecture hall with students seated at desks, overlaid with a large white text box containing the text 'Some lessons learnt'. The text box is tilted diagonally across the image. The background shows a classroom setting with rows of desks and chairs, a door, and windows.

Module context

- Concept:** Broadening, topical, professional
- Programme:** BMS, level 5, free choice
- Students:** EE, high Muslim, weak tail, 'east end'

Module topics

Topics relating particularly to bioethics

- Ethical frameworks
- Reproductive ethics
- Abortion
- Euthanasia
- Genethics

Topics relating particularly to health issues

- Who cares? – NHS
- Screening
- CAM.
- Antibiotic abuse
- Placebo effect
- The Nation's health

Intended learning outcomes

By the end of the module students should be able to:

- Write a short article for the New Scientist readership about a specified health issue.
- Conduct, evaluate and present a survey of opinion relating to a topical issue within health care or bioethics.
- Debate the dilemmas relating to specified health care issues.
- Reflect on their debating skills and evaluate their effectiveness.

Module assessments

100% coursework

1. Magazine article (25%)
2. Survey of opinion (40%)
 - Planning (10%)
 - Presentation (30%)
3. Debating skills (35%)
 - Weekly contribution (6%)
 - Peer assessment (4%)
 - Debate speech (15%)
 - Personal reflection (10%)

Added value

Engagement:

Develop interest in current 'health' affairs

Tolerance:

Accept right to hold unacceptable view

Confidence:

Gain confidence in representing opinion

Maturity:

Appreciate the intractability of a dilemma

Module programme

Wk

1. Review of current issues and survey introduction
2. Who cares? - NHS: Principles, formation and structures.
3. Questionnaire construction and Survey planning
4. Euthanasia - A right to die / Abortion - The rights to life.
5. Screening out? – Are screening programmes effective or should they be stopped?
Fighting infections - The use and abuse of antibiotics.
6. Reproductive ethics – The issues around IVF and other reproductive manipulations.
7. Complementary alternatives – issues relating to complementary and alternative medicine.
It's only placebo – The placebo effect
8. Genethics - the ethics of genetic manipulation.
9. Ethical frameworks and their relevance to Health Care
10. The Nation's health – Government policies and health realities
11. The Grand Debate
12. Debate reflection

Teaching methods

Promoting informed discussion (sometimes in groups) by:

- Q&A teaching
- Video with discussion
- Cuttings with review and discussion
- Interactive CD with discussion
- Case study scenarios

Raises issues of:

Expectations, seating, noise, rules, notes

Survey

- Opinions not facts
- Choose own topic
- Guidance essential
- Safety individually discussed
- Questionnaire design valuable

Debate propositions

This house believes that;

Hospital infections are an inevitable consequence of keeping ill people in one place.

Assisted suicide should be made legal in the UK.

The morning after pill should be freely and confidentially available to all teenagers

Human life starts at birth

Complementary and alternative therapies have no place in evidence-based medicine

Herbal remedies should be thoroughly tested.

Placebo is a misnomer

Health screening is a waste of resources

Gamete donors should remain anonymous.

Human surrogacy should not be allowed

Human cloning should never be done

Medical advances should be available to everyone

Animals should not be used in medical research

Research on embryonic human stem cells should not be allowed

At death our body should be public property

Debate conduct

- 2 minutes each, '3 for' alternate with '3 against', no topic choice, attendance 'stick'
- Challenging to manage & assess with large numbers
- Need clear proforma criteria:
Presentation, content, style, argument
- Good feedback difficult (Video?)
- Reflection exercise compensates for poor current debating skills

General observations

- Much added value provided
- No guidance for debate or reflection given
- Ethical theory not assessed
- Not making ethicists!
- Students need maturity and willingness
- Ethics needs relevant context

Student feedback

“A skill I feel is really important in debating is listening.”

“The more we are all exposed to exercises such as the ‘Grand Debate’ the more confident we’ll all become.”

“This module has helped to bring out qualities I never knew I possessed.”

“Personally I’ve enjoyed every minute of this module.”

“To devise a solution is not all that easy as all opinions have to be taken into account.”

“Over the period of the module my perceptions to back my strong beliefs have come under scrutiny.”

“Overall I wish we did a lot more of these types of modules as sharing and discussing ideas thrown around the class are the best ways to learn.”

“The debate taught me the value of team work and respect.”

“I learnt a lot during my two minutes of fame.”

“The debating skills have affected me personally in my social life and I am more confident about expressing my opinions.”

“I had to represent an issue that I believed personally was wrong and that has strengthened my capability to see other people’s views.”

“I would recommend that everyone should participate in a debate at some point in their lives.”

