Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Ethical Issues in Neuroprognostication after Severe Pediatric Brain Injury

Visit Article

ABSTRACT: Neurologic outcome prediction, or neuroprognostication, after severe brain injury in children is a challenging task and has many ethical dimensions. Neurologists and intensivists are frequently asked by families to predict functional recovery after brain injury to help guide medical decision making despite limited outcome data. Using two clinical cases of children with severe brain injury from different mechanisms: hypoxic-ischemic injury secondary to cardiac arrest and traumatic brain injury, this article first addresses the importance of making a correct diagnosis in a child with a disorder of consciousness and then discusses some of the clinical challenges with deducing an accurate and timely outcome prediction. We further explore the ethical obligations of physicians when supporting parental decision making. We highlight the need to focus on how to elicit family values for a brain injured child, how to manage prognostic uncertainty, and how to effectively communicate with families in these challenging situations. We offer guidance for physicians when they have diverging views from families on aggressiveness of care or feel pressured to prognosticate with in a "window of opportunity" for limiting or withdrawing life sustaining therapies. We conclude with a discussion of the potential influence of emerging technologies, specifically advanced functional neuroimaging, on neurologic outcome prediction after severe brain injury.

Journal:

Seminars in Pediatric Neurology
Authors: Jennifer Walter

Related Content

- Interventions to cultivate physician empathy: a systematic review
Article
Oct 2014