

**Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President Emeritus of Malta, at
The Bioethics Symposium**

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Rev. Profs. Emmanuel Agius

Prof. Antonio Autiero

Rev. Dr. Ray Zammit

Distinguished guests

I wish you all a very good morning.

We are all aware that socio-economic progress has impacted and continues to impact people's lives and their outlook towards life, ... as well as advancements in science and medical technology have created a situation whereby, health care professionals face ethical dilemmas more than ever before.

The need for clinical decision-making, controversial new research and the implications of emerging technologies, are also of global ethical concern.

Ethics involves the set of rules that society have agreed upon so as people can live harmoniously together. Such sets of rules can be found within our fundamental human rights.

On the other hand, bioethics is a branch of ethics which is the interdisciplinary study of problems created by biological and medical progress and its impact in society and value system, both for the present and the future.

Bioethics involve the human understanding of life. it was created by the necessity of the critical reflection of ethical conflicts which are caused by advancement in life science and medicine.

It is important to know that bioethics does not defend a particular moral attitude

Nor offer determinant and definite answers, but it searches a grounded critique and an argued reflection centred in the singularity of a concrete situation.

In bioethics, we find several guided ethical theories.

In this context, health care professionals need to apply the principles of bio ethics to the field of medicine to ensure that health practices and procedures keep the person, his or her loved ones and the society in general, at the core of such decision-making.

Correct decision-making in the field of healthcare ethics must be founded mainly on four basic principles, as outlined by Beauchamp and Childress; which are the principle of respect for autonomy,

Principle of non-maleficence,

Principle of beneficence and

the principle of justice.

The principle of autonomous exist when the person has the capacity to act and judge the consequences of their act and carry responsibility. An autonomous person has to be able to communicate his or her decision clearly.

The principle of beneficence is practised when a person acts in the beneficial interest of the other person. It is important to know that a person cannot do good against the will of the other person.

On the other hand, the principle of maleficence means that the person cannot harm other people.

For the principle of justice to be practised, the person needs to act fairly and equitably.

One must also consider the important principles in bioethics, which are mainly respect for human dignity, transparency to ensure access to information, caution based on the analysis of risks, proportionality, non-discrimination, respect for privacy and confidentiality and free participation and donation.

To be ethical is no easy task.

In the presence of such learned experts in the field of bioethics, I will certainly not endeavour to present any solution to the dilemmas or in any way trivialise the subject matter for discussion during this symposium.

Therefore, I have decided to present some food for thought, from a layperson's perspective, to stimulate further discussion.

I am aware that many questions arise when faced with ethical decisions. I am convinced that such questions as:

What is the right thing to do?

And what is the right action and for whom?

Should it be the consideration of the patient? His or her he Loved ones?

Or should one listen to his or her conscience?

Who is responsible, to whom and for what?

What are our obligations towards one another?

These are just some of the questions.

As you may be aware, bioethics is concerned with questions about basic human values such as the rights to life and to health.

Let me first address the fundamental human right to life. If we all have the right to life, then how do we explain procedures that put an end to this right,

especially when this is a medical procedure, normally carried out by a health professional who has sworn to 'do no harm?'

Let me take another example such as the right to health.

When we speak of the right to health, which is also a fundamental human right.

The right to health means that health services should be accessible to one and all; then why does one out of ten women in the European Union Member States does not have access to maternal health services?

When we speak about the right to health, we must also consider the right environment that is necessary to our health. In this context we must also consider the necessary accessibility of all products that promote health. Equitable access to medicine is also fundamental for the right health to be enjoyed.

Yet, in the world we live in today, we experience unhealthy environments, products that grow in pesticides, and chemotherapy that is prohibitively expensive.

In such a context, the effective right application of bioethics is today much broader and definitely plays a central role in the way which human dignity, respect, and fundamental human rights are ensured to be enjoyed by all.