

## A Pre-Doctoral Clinical Ethics Fellowship for Medical Students

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** Despite the need for trained physician ethicists, fellowships in clinical ethics are limited and primarily offered to those who have completed a graduate degree. The standardization of credentialing for clinical ethics consultants (CECs) and the restructuring of undergraduate medical education allow innovative models to train CECs that can provide an expanded opportunity for formal ethics training at an earlier stage.

**Methods.** At the University of Michigan Medical School we developed, implemented, and evaluated a pre-doctoral clinical ethics fellowship program from 2017 to 2019 for senior medical students, designed to meet established competencies for CECs. Consultation notes from the beginning and end of the fellowship program were randomly selected for each fellow and independently rated by two faculty ethicists who used the validated Ethics Consultation Quality Assessment Tool (ECQAT). Inter rater reliability and trends in scores over time were calculated.

**Results.** Three students successfully completed the fellowship at the University of Michigan Medical School, conducted at least 50 formal ethics consultations, and spent approximately 40 hours a week on service for a minimum of six months. All students finished the fellowship with teaching and policy development experience, first-authored peer-reviewed manuscripts, and national presentations. The fellows demonstrated improvement in their ECQAT overall holistic rating score; all ended their fellowship with a holistic score of adequate or above. There was 92 percent agreement between raters with respect to the acceptability of the fellows' ethics consult notes. Two fellows have taken and passed the Healthcare Ethics Consultant-Certification (HEC-C) exam offered by the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH).

**Conclusions.** Integration of a pre-doctoral fellowship model that meets professional certification standards for clinical ethics consultation creates an opportunity for medical students to become trained CECs early in their career.