

John Dossetor
Health Ethics
Centre



**JOHN DOSSETOR
HEALTH ETHICS CENTRE**

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SERIES**

HEALTH ETHICS SEMINAR

Two Problems with Four-Abilities Capacity



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Thursday, 17 October 2024

12:00 - 13:00 MDT

WEBINAR Presentation via Zoom application

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To say that someone has decision-making capacity is to say that they are able to make their own medical decisions in an appropriate way. The dominant form of characterizing and measuring capacity is the four abilities model, which was developed by Thomas Grisso and Paul Appelbaum, who also created the MacArthur Competence Assessment Tool (MacCAT-T), is broadly considered to be the most reliable capacity assessment tool. In this talk, I will argue that the four abilities model is too restrictive in two ways. The first is that the model includes conditions of capacity that are actually better characterized as conditions of informed consent. This means that a person should be able to demonstrate capacity without, for instance, demonstrating understanding of the specific medical decision at issue. The second problem is that the four abilities model fails to distinguish between valid informed consent and valid refusal. As I argue, the threshold for consent is higher than refusal, so requiring someone who wants to refuse treatment to be informed of the proposed treatment is unnecessarily demanding.

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