


Every Breath You Take

Ethical Considerations Regarding Health Care Metrics


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"uplifting the whole people"
— HENRY MARSHALL TOLSON, FOUNDER, PROGRESSIVE, 1938

Who are Metrics for?

- **Patients?**
 - Assumed to be interested in quality care
 - Not sensitive to provider metrics
- **Providers?**
 - Sensitive to reputation, status, and professional pride
 - Metrics alone do not improve patient outcomes
- **Administrators?**
 - Sensitive to reputation and threat of job loss
 - Targets improve if reputation can be repaired



The Upside of Metrics

- **Better ethics**
 - We ought to know if we are helping
 - We ought to know if we are harming
- **Better care**
 - Particularly with rare and complex cases
 - Effective practices can be shared
- **Better decisions**
 - Attend to aspects of care that matter
 - More reliable and efficient



An Example

1. Derek seems to know what he is talking about

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

2. This talk is covering material that I hoped it would

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

3. I like Derek's approach to presenting the material

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

4. Overall, this talk is going well

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree



The Downside of Metrics

• **Problems of measurement**

- Selecting one target displaces another
- Precision is inversely related to importance

• **Unintended consequences**

- Measure fixation and ossification: "Treat to the test"
- Resources are diverted from providing care

• **Campbell's/Goodhart's law**

- Any metric used for control becomes corrupt
- Fosters gaming and degrades outcomes



Heart Attack Deaths

• **The measure**

- EMS response to heart attacks within 8 minutes

• **The consequences**

- *Reported* improved response times to heart attacks
- No change in response times to other emergencies

• **Campbell's/Goodhart's law**

- Ambulances deployed to high density areas
- Calls reclassified after ambulance response



A Way Forward

- **Use metrics wisely**
 - To evaluate systems – not providers
 - Require evidence that benefits outweigh burdens
- **Use metrics collaboratively**
 - Providers to identify meaningful metrics
 - Managers to review utility of metrics
- **Use metrics to assist**
 - Normative information for provider or system
 - Enable individual or institutional learning



Thank You

- Questions?
- derek.truscott@ualberta.ca
- The handouts to accompany this presentation are available on the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre website:
ualberta.ca/john-dossetor-health-ethics-centre



References

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