

Guidelines for applicants

BMA essay competition on justice and fairness in medical practice and policy

Information for applicants

As part of the current BMA President's 'fairness project' the BMA is launching a one-off essay competition on the theme of 'justice and fairness in medical practice and policy'. The winning entry will receive a prize of £4000. We want original essays that use ethical reasoning and theory to address a contemporary, practical problem in medicine and help provide a solution based on an explained and defended sense of fairness/justice.

Over the last 35 years the President, Professor Raanan Gillon, has enthusiastically promoted 'the four principles approach' to medical ethics, familiar to many doctors as an accessible and practical method for tackling problems in medical ethics. Decision-makers consider whether an action, choice or policy promotes benefit ('beneficence'), avoids or minimises harm ('non-maleficence'), respects or promotes individuals' thought-out choices for themselves ('respect for autonomy'), and is fair or just ('justice'). The first two have been part of medical ethics since Hippocratic times. Respect for autonomy and justice are relatively recent concepts in medical ethics. In 2017 the World Medical Association added respect for patients' autonomy to its contemporary version of the Hippocratic Oath, the Declaration of Geneva. At the instigation of Professor Gillon the BMA is currently proposing to the WMA that it adds a 'balancing' commitment to fairness/justice to the Declaration of Geneva and its companion document the International Code of Medical Ethics. The additional sentence proposed is 'I shall strive to practise fairly and justly throughout my professional life'.

But while most reflective people approve of fairness and justice, we all find it difficult to say what we actually mean by those terms. Equality is an intrinsic component of those terms, but they don't simply mean equality. Yet considerations of fairness or justice along with notions of 'equal treatment' are at the heart of everyday decision-making in medicine and they underpin broader policies. Which patient should be triaged to receive priority treatment? How can errors in medical practice be remedied fairly? Is it fair or just to deny access to treatment to patients who act or behave in ways that cause their ill health? Or who abuse their clinicians? What do we mean by fair and just distribution and deployment of scarce health service resources and how should we implement these?

This essay prize is part of Professor Gillon's Presidential 'fairness project' and aims to help advance discussion in this important area of medical ethics.

We want original essays that, in easily understandable English, use ethical reasoning and theory to tackle challenging, practical, contemporary problems in healthcare that have justice and fairness at their core. For the purpose of this essay, fairness and justice are assumed to mean the same thing, but applicants are welcome to distinguish between the two in their essays. The essays should explain and defend the sense of 'fairness/justice' that the author is using and apply it to a practical problem or problems faced by doctors in the context of their practice within UK healthcare. These problems could be at individual patient level or refer to groups of patients or to wider populations. Additionally, arguments relating to the UK in relation to international comparators might appropriately be included in an essay.

Issues of potential relevance could include – but are not restricted to:

- Frontline practice – how does fairness/justice impinge on the General Medical Council's instruction to doctors to 'Make the care of your patient your first concern'?
- Public health – conversely how does fairness/justice to populations cohere with the public health doctor's GMC requirement to 'Make the care of your patient your first concern'?
- Rights-based justice – can patients' rights conflict with fairness/justice and if so, how can a commitment to fairness/justice as defended by the essay-writer help to resolve such conflicts?
- What sense of fairness/justice can best inform health-related public policy and how can it best be implemented for a specific policy issue or issues?
- Legal justice – both ethics and law incorporate commitments to fairness/justice. Can a shared account of fairness/justice resolve examples of conflicts between medical ethics and medical law?
- Procedural fairness/justice – sometimes conflicts between claims can only be resolved by fair/just processes or procedures. Can an account of procedural justice help to resolve practical problems in UK medical practice?
- Can health economics offer a widely acceptable account of fairness/justice, of practical use in UK medical practice?
- Can any theory of fairness/justice based on reward and punishment provide a useful contribution to UK medical practice?

The suggestions above are only indicative. Any explained and defended account of fairness/justice and of its application in ways relevant to UK medical practice is eligible, subject to the conditions set out in the guidance for applicants and term and conditions.

The following is a summary of requirements but you are required to read our full **terms and conditions** which shall prevail in the event of any conflict:

1. The competition is being run by the British Medical Association. It is open to single applicants or groups who are resident in the UK and aged 18 or over. BMA members may apply unless excluded in the next sentence. The following **are not eligible** to enter:
 - a. employees or contractors of the BMA or its holding or subsidiary companies (including BMJ);
 - b. members of a BMA branch of practice or specialist committee;
 - c. BMA Chief Officers;
 - d. employees or contractors of agents or suppliers of the BMA or its holding or subsidiary companies, who are professionally connected with the competition or its administration; or
 - e. members of the immediate families or households of (a) to (d) above.
2. The theme for the competition is justice and fairness in medical practice and policy. Essays must have a practical, medical focus and use ethical reasoning and theory to analyse an issue or issues relevant to the current or future UK health system.
3. The competition is being run as a two-stage process. First, entrants are asked to submit an initial abstract in English of no more than 500 words excluding title and any references (a maximum of 10 references is permitted for the abstract) but including footnotes (as distinct from references) and any words included within any illustrative material to support the abstract, such as graphs, charts or images.
4. The **opening date** for abstracts is **5 December 2019** and the **closing date** for abstracts is **30 January 2020, 5pm GMT**.
5. 10 abstracts will be shortlisted by the judging panel, and the selected authors will then be invited to submit a full and final essay for judging, which is stage two.
6. Shortlisted entrants for stage two will be informed by 24 February 2020.
7. The **opening time for stage two** is from notification of shortlisting and the deadline for final submissions from shortlisted authors is **30 April 2020, 5pm GMT**. The winner will be notified by 1 June 2020.
8. Final essay submissions must be in English and should not exceed 5000 words (but with a 5% leeway – so no more than 5250 words), excluding title and references but including all words in the abstract, in any footnotes (as distinct from references) and any words included within any illustrative material such as graphs, charts or images, which supports the essay. The abstract, should be similar to, but does not have to be identical with the abstract originally submitted.
9. All essays must be typed and submitted as MS Word or PDF documents. Pages must be numbered.
10. References must be at the end of the essay, should be easily accessible by the judges and other readers, and must support the specific issue being referenced. References to books and other long works should include relevant page numbers. We recommend a maximum of 15 references.

11. A cover sheet must accompany the abstract and the essay detailing:
 - a. Title(s);
 - b. Name(s);
 - c. Address(es);
 - d. E-mail address(es);
 - e. Work organisation/institution(s) (if applicable);
 - f. Statement of word-count (excluding references and title) but including all other words including the abstract, any footnotes (as distinct from references) and any words included within any illustrative material supporting the essay, such as graphs, charts or images; and
 - g. A declaration of any competing interests for any authors (or if none, a statement that there are no competing interests) – *see the terms and conditions for more detail.*

Apart from on the cover sheet, the author(s) should not identify himself/herself/themselves.

8. All abstracts and essays should be e-mailed as an attachment to your coversheet to essay@bma.org.uk with the subject 'Essay competition abstract' or 'Essay competition full essay'.
9. By entering, authors are agreeing that their names and entries may be published by or on behalf of the BMA. Please see the full terms and conditions regarding all uses of your personal data and any rights granted regarding this and entries.
10. The marking criteria and exclusion criteria are specified below.
11. The decision of the judging panel is final. Unfortunately, we will not be able to provide feedback on either abstracts or full essay submissions and no correspondence concerning the judges' decisions will be entered into.
12. The winning essay author(s) will receive a total of £4000 for the essay and the essay may be published by or on behalf of the BMA. The shortlisted abstract author(s) will receive £100 in total for each abstract, subject to a full essay being submitted in line with these guidelines and our terms and conditions. All prize money for stages 1 and 2 will be paid after the essay winner has been announced and the competition has ended.

Judging

Exclusion criteria; abstracts and essays characterised by any of the following exclusion criteria will be rejected:

- The abstract is more than 500 words (not including the title or references) but including any footnotes (as distinct from references) and any words included within any illustrative material supporting the abstract, such as graphs, charts or images
- The essay is more than 5250 words (not including the title or references but including the abstract) but including any footnotes (as distinct from references) and any words included within any illustrative material supporting the essay, such as graphs, charts or images
- The entrant(s) are not UK residents or aged 18 years or over
- The essay does not have a practical or medical healthcare focus and use ethical reasoning and theory to analyse an issue or issues relevant to the current or future UK health system
- The essay or abstract is not in English is not submitted as a Microsoft Word or PDF document or otherwise meet the stated requirements in these guidelines and/or terms and conditions
- Late submission
- An author is ineligible as stated in paragraph 1 above

Marking criteria

Poor – 1

Average – 2

Good – 3

Very Good – 4

Excellent – 5

Outstanding – 6

- Practical applicability or contribution to the problem discussed
- Originality
- Explanation and application of theory
- Clarity of argument and exposition
- Reasoned conclusion

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