

PHM 3050: Death and Dying
University of North Florida

Course description

From the course catalog: "In this course, we take a philosophical approach to death and dying in order to understand and analyze some of the ethical, medical, psychological, and legal issues surrounding death and dying. Topics to be covered include whether life is always preferable to death, deciding how much control we should have over our own deaths, how much control (if any) advance directives should have in directing end-of-life treatment plans, how much money should be spent on expensive treatments which provide little benefit, the right of hospitals to decide when life prolonging treatment is futile, the moral obligation of doctors to tell their patients their prognosis, differential criteria for determining death, and whether one is allowed to bring about or assist in the death of another."

In some ways, this is similar to a biomedical ethics course. We will survey a range of moral theories that relate to bioethical concerns and research ethics, as well as delve into a number of case studies. But a full appreciation of these debates in ethics may only be possible once we have answered some more basic (but not necessarily simpler) questions: What do we mean by 'death' and 'life?' Is death always bad – or is more life always good? What constitutes 'killing,' 'harm,' and 'personal interests' in this context?

"Death and Dying" offers a unique chance to wed more broadly theoretical debates about the nature of death, dying, and their distinct potential harms with more specific ethical concerns about euthanasia and (physician-assisted) suicide, abortion, paternalism and patient autonomy, the obligations of physicians and medical personnel to tell the truth to patients, what constitutes informed consent, the appropriateness of and limits to human and nonhuman animal research, and reproductive technology and cloning.