

Ethics after Hours



Dr. Feelgood – Dealer or Healer? Documentary, 2016

Summary

Opioid abuse is among the fastest growing drug problems in the USA. In 2016 the US Federal Government issued its first national guidelines on opioid painkillers with a view to addressing problems with doctors overprescribing these drugs. This documentary tells the story about Dr. William Hurwitz, a preeminent doctor who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for overprescribing painkillers. The documentary provides an excellent insight into the complex ethical issues associated with prescribing opioids by telling the story of Dr. Hurwitz from various perspectives, including his patients, his family, and himself.

Duration: 1 hr 24 mins.

Director and Producer: Eve Marson

Available on Netflix

Questions for discussion:

- There is currently no consensus about the best treatment for chronic pain. What was your initial reaction to Dr. Hurwitz' approach to chronic pain management?
- What ethical challenges arise for health care providers when there is no consensus on best practices?
- In your opinion, what is the doctor's responsibility towards the patient when there is a serious risk of addiction associated with the treatment?
- Dr. Hurwitz argues that the doctor's responsibility is to respect the patient's choices - do you agree? Why or why not?
- Dr. Hurwitz's ex-wife describes how she saw some of his patients faking pain. When, if ever, is it appropriate for a doctor to question what the patient reports?
- Dr. Hurwitz argues that moralising and/or being judgemental is counterproductive to being a doctor. Do you agree? Why?
- Discuss the role of the pharmaceutical industry in the problem with over prescription of opioid pain killers.

- The US guidelines recommend that opioids be prescribed for no more than 3-7 days. Do you think it is reasonable to deny long term treatment with opioids to patients with chronic pain?
- Consider the question that was raised in the documentary: “How can we be compassionate doctors trying to help these individuals experience less pain while also not creating addiction?”