Outlook

UAMS Medical Humanities and Bioethics Newsletter - November 2026

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Education: Spring Electives and Frankenstein Night

This Spring, the Department will offer five different elective classes taught by faculty members. The courses are open to fourth year medical students (M4). These include Death & Dying; Medical Spanish; Literature and Medicine; Biomedical Ethics; and the Ethics of Clinical Practice. Death & Dying is also open to Pharmacy students.



On October 29, Department faculty gathered with medical students enrolled in the Medical Humanities Honors Track to discuss Mary Shelley ’s original 1818 text, *Frankenstein* . A lively discussion ensued, touching on various topics such as abandonment issues, who counts as human, and moral culpability. Dinner from Taziki ’s Mediterranean Café was served. The discussion was led by Dr. Angela Scott and Dr. Lauren Bunch. The Department now has 17 medical humanities students, including two at our Northwest campus.



Scholarship

The Department had a strong showing at the American Society for Bioethics & Humanities Annual Conference in October. Three faculty members, as well as the physician chair of Arkansas Children's Hospital (ACH) Bioethics Advisory Committee, attended and presented during the meeting.

Dr. D. Micah Hester served on a panel titled, “Nondisclosure in Pediatrics: Assent, Awareness, and the Limits of Truth-Telling. ” He was joined by colleagues from Oakland University, The University of Chicago, and University of Rochester. The panel examined three cases where the patient's awareness, experiences, and outcomes affect considerations regarding disclosure and participation. Dr. Hester analyzed a case in which parents of a teenager with relapsed acute myeloid leukemia asked the oncology team not to disclose the diagnosis. The presentation examined the tensions between parental authority, the teenager's developing autonomy, and clinicians' duties of honesty.





Dr. Catherine O ’Brien (UAMS) and Dr. Kevin Bielamowicz (ACH) joined Dr. Brandy Fox (UAMS) and a fourth colleague from the University of Wisconsin - Madison to present a panel titled, “Politics, Parasites, and Professional Autonomy: The Case of Ivermectin. ” Ivermectin, known primarily for treating parasitic infections, has surged in popularity lately, being touted as preventing or treating conditions like COVID and cancer despite a lack of evidence. Usually available by patient-specific prescription only, multiple states have passed or pending legislation aimed at increasing access to ivermectin through community pharmacies via mechanisms such as over the counter (OTC) status or collaborative practice agreements as part of an increasing emphasis on "medical freedom." This multidisciplinary panel used the case of ivermectin to discuss the impacts that legislative fiat and the medical freedom movement are having on the professional autonomy of healthcare providers.

Dr. Fox also presented a paper titled, “Inclusive borders of end-of-life care: Reframing chronic suicidality and end of life care ” for the Psychiatry & Psychotherapy Affinity Group. The paper argues that suicidal people are currently left out of end-of-life care discussions and services. She advocates for a end-of-life model of palliative care centered on accompaniment for some chronically suicidal people.

Clinical: ACH Magnet Site Visit

In October, the Ethics program at ACH was reviewed by the American Nurses Credentialing Center ’s (ANCC) Magnet Site team. Per the ANCC website, “The Magnet Recognition Program designates organizations worldwide where nursing leaders successfully align their nursing strategic goals to improve the organization ’s patient outcomes. ”

The inspection team reviewed our ethics processes and procedures, the resources we have available for staff, and some of the consults and work we have done over the past 3 years. Lametria Wafford, ACH ’s Director of Nursing Excellence, sent this message to the Ethics team at the conclusion of the site visit: “Arkansas Children's Hospital has officially wrapped the 2026 Magnet site visit! The appraisers were complimentary throughout their three days and told teams today that this visit ‘made them proud to be nurses. ’ I want to thank all the clinical nurses, team leaders, council members, interprofessional partners — and each of you who supported this work — for your dedication and commitment to excellence over the three day visit and throughout the preparation for this visit. The appraisers will submit an overall summary to the Commission on Magnet Recognition, and we should have an official decision in early 2027. Thank you again for all the hard work. ”

Other: Bartholome Award Given to Micah Hester, Ph.D.



D. Micah Hester, Ph.D., Professor of Medical Humanities and Pediatrics and Chair of the Department, has been selected by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) as the recipient of the 2026 William G. Bartholome Award for Ethical Excellence. Dr. Bartholome was a pediatrician at the University of Kansas Medical Center who designed and implemented pioneering programs in clinical ethics. This prestigious recognition honors Dr. Hester ’s significant impacts on public discussion of ethical issues in pediatric medicine.

Nominated by several colleagues, Dr. Hester is only the fourth non-physician to receive the award since its establishment in 2000. Nationally recognized for his expertise in both adult and pediatric ethics, Dr. Hester has played an instrumental role in advancing ethics education, clinical consultation, research, and scholarship throughout his career.

Dr. Hester founded the Pediatric Ethics Consortium, the first national coalition dedicated to bringing together pediatric ethicists. This innovative initiative helped establish a foundation for collaboration among professionals working to address complex ethical challenges in pediatric health care. The consortium also served as a catalyst for Dr. Hester ’s proposal and subsequent development of the Pediatric Ethics Affinity Group within the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, further strengthening the national community of pediatric ethics professionals.
For more than 22 years, Dr. Hester has provided leadership in ethics education, clinical ethics consultation, scholarly activity, and related initiatives at UAMS and Arkansas Children ’s Hospital (ACH). His sustained efforts have helped foster thoughtful ethical decision-making, support clinicians navigating challenging cases, and advance the integration of ethics into health care practice.

The AAP ’s selection of Dr. Hester for this distinguished award recognizes not only his professional accomplishments but also his enduring impact on the field of medical ethics and his leadership in shaping the future of pediatric ethics nationally.

Staff Highlight – Benji Nicholas, Exec. Assistant

This month, we are excited to highlight on one of our staff members: Benji Nicholas.



Benji is our Executive Administrative Assistant and has been with our department for 2 years. On a daily basis, Benji helps manage our department's social media and website, and helps takes care of the logistics of travel, events, and purchases. Overall, Benji helps our department stay on track and does so many things behind the scenes to help everything run smoothly.

Here are a few questions we asked Benji to get to know him better:

Something you like about Little Rock/Central Arkansas:
After being in Central Arkansas for 5 years now, I love the proximity to some really great places to hike and camp. I also have a lot of family in the area, which has made it come to feel like home.

Something from where you lived in the past you wish we had here:
I used to live in Jackson, TN but spent many years before that growing up overseas in Kenya at an international school. One thing I miss from those days is getting to enjoy such a diversity of cultures in one place.

A talent you have or activity/hobby you like to do:

When I have time, I really enjoy getting lost in a puzzle. Aside from that, I enjoy hiking, volleyball, and learning languages (currently on a 1050-day French streak on Duolingo)

Movie you would recommend to a friend:
I have a special place in my heart for the three original *Lord of the Rings* trilogy

Movie you would tell anyone to avoid:
Everything Everywhere All at Once . Strangest movie I've ever seen.

Best advice you ’ve ever received:
My uncle Philip told me when I was younger: “Don ’t forget that people and relationships are the most important part of life. ”

We're so glad to have you in our department, Benji!

Visit Our Department Website

UAMS College of Medicine