

Episode: *Author Interview: “Can One Health Policy Help Us Expand an Ethics of Interconnection and Interdependence?”*

Guest: Karen M. Meagher, PhD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[00:00:04] HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Karen Meagher, an assistant professor of biomedical ethics in the Biomedical Ethics Research Program at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She’s here to discuss her article, “*Can One Health Policy Help Us Expand an Ethics of Interconnection and Interdependence?*,” in the February 2024 issue of the Journal, [Health Ecology and Disease Transmission](#). Dr Meagher, thank you so much for being here. [music fades]

DR KAREN MEAGHER: Ah, it’s a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

[00:00:45] HOFF: So, what’s the main ethics point of your article?

MEAGHER: So, antimicrobial resistance is a problem about microbes. Viruses and bacteria are increasingly able to withstand or survive our available treatments, and because they’re so hard to treat, sometimes they’re called “superbugs.” And the key point of the article is that antimicrobial resistance does occur at that microscopic level, but the solutions we need to tackle it extend all the way up to the level of One Health policy, or policies that are coordinated across environmental, animal, and human health. And I think bioethics can help.

[00:01:21] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

MEAGHER: Yeah, the article really is a primer that asks readers to think and act more collaboratively around these key One Health concepts of interconnection and interdependence. Interconnection we can think of as really different ways to think about causation, and interdependence really centers around this question of what obligations arise when we realize that our health is interconnected across environment, animal, and humans in these ways. And so, it’s tempting to frame these antimicrobial resistance problems in ways that we encounter them, especially as clinicians if you think about your trainees. They might be really likely to tackle them in the context in which they’re working and seeing patients in a day-to-day practice. So, if you’re working in primary care pediatrics, you might encounter a child with an ear infection. And the question there is always, is it viral? Is it bacterial? Do I prescribe? Will this mom or this dad ever be able to be in my office again? Or are there barriers to care that make me feel

pressured to prescribe the antibiotic even if I think it's unnecessary? Meanwhile, someone who's training in health promotion might be really worried about all the antibiotics that we're using in livestock production, not for prevention or the treatment of infections that are affecting those animals, but for growth promotion. And so, it's really tempting to choose those lower levels of analysis because they're more practical and intuitive, but One Health policy draws our attention to the broader contexts for all antimicrobial use and the interdependence of one of these forums on another.

[00:03:06] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

MEAGHER: Oh, let's collaborate!

BOTH: [laugh]

MEAGHER: Yeah, it's really an invitation. Bioethics is a multidisciplinary field, and it's really about thinking and acting about antimicrobial resistance together. And especially with One Health policy, it's going to take a lot of collaboration. And on the one hand, we have so many lessons to draw from the history of bioethics, which is a field that doesn't really draw from a single discipline. It's one that originated in rethinking what team science and what medicine could look like if it was done in partnership with patients and across disciplinary silos. But on the other hand, big changes are needed even in bioethics, which traditionally hasn't included building bridges across microbiology, agriculture, environmental sciences, veterinary medicine, and clinical practice, which is what a One Health policy approach really calls for. [theme music returns]

[00:04:05] HOFF: Dr Meagher, thank you again so much for your time on the podcast, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

MEAGHER: Oh, thanks so much for having me. I really meant it. If you're interested in these issues, please feel free to reach out to me. I'd love to talk to you.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.