

Episode: ***Author Interview: “What Law Enforcement Can Learn From Health Care About Moral Injury”***

Guest: Wendy Dean, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

TIM 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 format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Wendy Dean, a psychiatrist and co-founder of the nonprofit organization Moral Injury of Health Care, which was founded in 2018 to address health care workforce distress. She's here to discuss her article, [What Law Enforcement Can Learn From Health Care About Moral Injury](#), in the February 2022 issue of *The Journal*, [Tactical Health and Law Enforcement](#). Dr Dean, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [theme music fades out]

DR WENDY DEAN: Oh, Tim, thank you so much for the invitation. This is great.

HOFF: To begin with, what is the main ethics point that you're advancing in your article?

DEAN: So, I think what we need to think about is how we can support both health care workers and law enforcement in doing very difficult jobs in high conflict areas. Because I think when we leave them alone with some of these questions that come up repeatedly, it's hard for individuals to always come up with the right answer on the spot. I think it's important for us to be cognizant of the fact that there are deep ethical issues in every sort of sphere of work that we do, but especially in health care or law enforcement. Not attending to the ethics can have dramatically different outcomes.

HOFF: Mmhmm. And when you say, “when we leave people alone with these sorts of questions,” what kinds of questions are you referring to?

DEAN: Well, so, in the article, I talked about the various values, value categories that folks will be faced with as they're looking at these questions. So, for example, there are questions that will challenge one's own personal views of the world or one's personal value set, but there are other questions that will challenge their professional set of values.

HOFF: Mm. That's helpful. Thank you. So, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take away from your article?

DEAN: That it's not intuitive to know what to do in some of these difficult situations. That it really matters that we anticipate that a whether you're a medical student or a nurse trainee or a respiratory therapist or in law enforcement as a trainee, we need to anticipate that in a long career, everyone will come face to face with some of these difficult challenges. And it's best to prepare for those ahead of time and have rehearsed what a response might be.

HOFF: Hmm. Yeah, I think that's an important point. There's often a tendency, I think, to fall back on this idea that you already know what the right thing to do is, or you'll know

when the time comes. So, I think it's important to point out that ethical practice is not just a matter of this intuitive exercise.

DEAN: Yeah. I mean, I think this is all, it's a matter of professional maturation, and that's what we need good mentors for.

HOFF: Mmhmm, mmhmm. Absolutely. To wrap up here, what is a point that you would like to add to your article, but you just didn't have the time or space to attend to?

DEAN: The article doesn't have the scope to talk about the societal implications of transgressions at a societal level or betrayals at a societal level that both health care and law enforcement have been experiencing, particularly over the last 18 months. And I think it behooves all of us in our society to think hard about what we want to be as a whole and how we might put either health professionals or law enforcement at odds with their own value system by some of the behaviors that we undertake. For example, in health care, I think the question about vaccination and mask wearing has been a difficult one. And I think we're asking health care workers to make sure that they protect society and to be there when we need them to be there without always taking the personal responsibility that we have to our own fellows in society. Freedom doesn't imply freedom from responsibility. We still have, as individuals, a responsibility to our communities. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Dr Dean, thank you so much for your insight on this topic and for taking the time to be on the podcast this month.

DEAN: Thank you so much. It was a pleasure.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of the February 2022 issue for free, visit our site, [JournalofEthics.org](https://www.journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.