

Religion and Medical Ethics Symposium press conference remarks, December 10, 2019 by Dr Kamran Abbasi, Executive Editor, The BMJ

Good morning. I'm delighted to be here to represent BMJ.

This conference is perfectly in line with our core values: Transparent, open and trusted; Patient-centred; Evidence-based – and our vision for a Healthier World

We aim to bring a medical perspective to these discussions.

If we do believe in being patient-centred, which we all of us here do, then we must find common ground for a constructive conversation that recognises that people's beliefs play an important and central part in their decision making about their health.

For over two decades, The BMJ has championed evidence-based approaches to care, and it is important now, in the era of shared decision making in health, in the age of patient partnership, that we find ways to make sure that people from all faiths and backgrounds are able to draw on the evidence and science to live long and healthy lives.

Crucially, on the issues that we will be discussing over the next few days, end of life care and mental health in the elderly, religious beliefs and evidence must work in harmony to help patients and their families face these complex challenges.

BMJ encourages open/balanced debate that reflects medical, legal, ethical, and religious views. We help inform clinicians, based on the latest evidence, so they can make decisions in the best interests of their patients. And we support shared decision making – taking account of patient / family values and beliefs.

We'd like to thank the editors of the Journal of Medical Ethics (Prof John McMillan, Prof Julian Hughes, Prof Kenneth Boyd) for their paper, which is available for you to read today. We hope it will inform and prompt debate. The Islamic and Catholic case studies are designed to prompt discussion over the next two days and will form the basis for Prof Julian Hughes' presentation tomorrow. The paper raises some of the key issues in religion and medicine, from decision making to the role of advance directives.

We, the BMJ, intend to feature the discussions we will have here in a follow paper which we'll share in the new year.

Finally, we'd very much like to thank Sultana Afdhal and Archbishop Paglia for organising and hosting this important meeting.

At a moment of global discord, disharmony, and danger, it is symbolic that we are gathering here at The Vatican to show the power of people from all faiths and backgrounds in coming together to solve the world's problems.

Thank you.