Letter to the Editor

Neuroethics are more than the bioethics of neuroscience

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Dear Sir,

Evolutionary changes in the knowledge society and the rapid increase of scientific and technological information have outlined new territories and dilemmas for health professionals.

New challenges and new demands need to be faced so as to make balanced decisions that privilege the wellbeing and the rights of individuals and their priorities as patients.

The Hippocratic Oath and other deontological codes have contributed, from the global historical perspective, to the regulation of these actions. However, many of these precepts have been overtaken by new questions and ethical dilemmas.

Bioethics was originally created as a survival strategy that allows the preservation of the rights of the individuals and their ecosystems in the face of uncontrolled technical growth and technological development based on supply and demand. That is why Bioethics has positioned itself as a contemporary, valid regulatory axis in health and medicine.[1]

In neurosciences, punctual paradigms of knowledge, which also require more specialized attention, are introduced. The enormous display of scientific information in this area, technological development and its Translational impact have surpassed both our capacity to regulate and the dimension of the decisions centered on the wellbeing of the patient. That is why civil society and a meeting of journalists and science advocates proposed the concept of neuroethics before the scientific community did.

Beyond the use or the fashion of the prefix neuro, which some authors consider eroded and unreasonably abused, the international community of bioethicists dedicated to neurosciences has identified a process that is supported by both branches: (i) Solid education in bioethical knowledge and (ii) Knowledge as an expert in the area of neurosciences. That is why we pose the question of the pertinence and validity of the concept of neuroethics as an entity that represents a more integral and global vision than a bioethics of neurosciences.[3,4]

International consensus identifies two fundamental meanings in this innovative perspective of the discipline: On the one hand, Ethics in Neuroscience, which refers to the analysis of all the ethical implications that arise in the creation of knowledge, research, technological development, and clinical practice (Neurology, Neurosurgery, Psychiatry), according to a specific sociocultural context. And on the other hand, there is the Neuroscience of Ethics, which refers to the study of the neural basis for ethical behavior, free will, moral conscience and behavior based on values and precepts. In consequence, neuroethics supposes a dual and bi-directional concept with an axis that connects a great number of topics that need to be considered through the lens of humanistic thought and not only through hard scientific data.[5]

The editorial proposal described by Faria[2] analyzes the certainty that the Hippocratic Oath does not cover all

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the branches of knowledge in current neurosciences and proposes an ethics of Neuroscience. However, the reach of disciplinary ethics covers only marginal aspects of the field of Bioethics within the enormous area of scientific and technological knowledge that is Neuroscience.

That is why we must emphasize the relevance of strengthening ethical education in the training of human resources for health.

Although the scientific community has worked to refine its educational processes and their pragmatic application that preserves the principles and values of neuroethics, there is suspicion based on the fact that ethical decisions must obey to the educational profile of the medical-scientific individual, to his or her internal and moral will, and not to a legal precept. Neuroethics must appeal to the moral conscience of individuals about what is right and wrong in the area of Neuroscience, and not necessarily to a legal assertion.

It seems that the concept of Neuroethics is here to stay, in the expectation that it can be conformed by specialized personnel who are honorable scientific leaders, to serve as a guide to decision-making in ethical dilemmas in the neurosciences, all of this under the premise of maintaining and conserving the rights of the individual and the rights of the patient from a humanistic perspective.

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