

The Neurosurgeon's Dilemma: Ethics in High-Stakes Decisions

Every day in neurosurgery we stand at the intersection of skill and consequence. The decisions we make—often under time pressure and with imperfect data—carry weighty implications for life, function, and dignity. These moments reveal the core ethical dilemmas of our craft: how to balance hope with realism, innovation with safety, and respect for autonomy with the responsibility to protect.

In emergencies, consent can be brief or impossible, yet we must act. In elective care, families may ask for every possible intervention despite low odds. New technologies—minimally invasive devices, neuromodulation, AI-based prognostication—promise much but also bring unknowns. We must ask not only whether we can do something, but whether we should, and on what evidence. Transparency with patients and families, honest communication about uncertainty, and shared decision-making must become routine practices, not occasional luxuries.

Resource constraints sharpen ethical choices. When ICU beds, implants, or skilled teams are limited, prioritisation becomes unavoidable. We must strive for fairness in allocation, guided by clinical need and ethical clarity rather than convenience or influence.

Conflicts of interest—commercial ties, training incentives—require disclosure and active management so that patient welfare remains the guiding star.

Cultural context matters. In Bangladesh, family dynamics, financial realities, and social expectations shape decisions. The neurosurgeon must be fluent not only in anatomy but in empathy—listening, explaining, and partnering with patients and families to find acceptable paths. Ethical practice also means protecting vulnerable patients, advocating for those without voice, and promoting systems that reduce inequity.

Ultimately, ethics in neurosurgery is practical and everyday. It lives in the bedside conversation, the consent form, the selection of cases, and the humility to say “I don't know.” If we combine technical excellence with moral clarity, we honor both the science and the humanity of neurosurgery.

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