

Ethics – Charité Mental Health

Persons and functions

The department for psychiatry and psychotherapy, CCM, has a working group “Philosophy of Psychiatry, Neurophilosophy and Medical Ethics”, led by assistant professor Dr. Sabine Müller and Prof. Dr. Dr. Henrik Walter.

(https://mindandbrain.charite.de/projekte/neurophilosophie_und_ethik/medizinethik/).

Dr. Sabine Müller has a PhD in philosophy and her habilitation is for neurophilosophy and medical ethics. She is member of the “Akademie für Ethik in der Medizin e. V.” (AEM), and coleader of the “AG Neuroethics” in the AEM. She is member of the Clinical Ethics Committee (KEK) of the Charité in formation. Furthermore, she is member of several working groups dealing with ethical and legal aspects of psychiatry: “AG Ethics in Psychiatry” in the AEM, “AG Human Rights” of the “Aktion Psychisch Kranke e.V.”, “Commission for Ethics and Law in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy” of the DGPPN, and “AG Suicide Assistance” of the DGPPN. Sabine Müller has led two third-party funded projects in neuroethics (DFG: MU 3321 1-1; BMBF: 01 GP 1621A). She was coordinator of the international consortium “Psychiatric neurosurgery – ethical, legal and societal issues”, ERA-NET NEURON, BMBF).

Prof. Dr. Dr. Henrik Walter has, besides his MD, a PhD in philosophy. He served as Head of the Taskforce “Ethics in Psychiatry” of the DGPPN (2013-2015) and as Head of the “Ethical Research Committee of the European Brain Project” (2014-2018). Furthermore, he is member of the Ethics Committee of the Charité. He was coordinator of the international consortium “NeuroSCAN – Ethical and legal aspects of norms in neuroimaging” (BMBF: 01 GP 0804).

Prof. Dr. Surjo Soekadar is PI in the international consortium “Hybrid Minds: Experiential, ethical and legal investigation of intelligent neuroprostheses” (ERA-NET NEURON).

Prof. Dr. Dr. Andreas Heinz is member of the “Commission for Ethics and Law in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy” of the DGPPN and of the “AG Suicide Assistance” of the DGPPN.

Prof. Dr. Christine Heim is member of the Ethics Committee of the Charité.

Dr. Ulrike Lüken is member of the Ethics Committee of the Medical Faculty of the TU Dresden.

Prof. Dr. Meryam Schouler-Ocak is member of the Ethics Committee of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA).

Further activities

Prof. Dr. Felix Bermpohl is co-coordinating the Winter School “Ethics and Neuroscience” of the BCCN Berlin/ICCN and the Berlin School of Mind and Brain since now 10 years.

PD Dr. Sabine Müller regularly gives lectures and seminars at the Charité on medical ethics, and supervises several PhD students working in this field.

Ethical research projects and ethical research support

Research topics of the working group “Philosophy of Psychiatry, Neurophilosophy and Medical Ethics” are ethical issues of interventions into the brain (e.g., deep brain stimulation, ablative psychiatric neurosurgery, epilepsy surgery, radiosurgery, and optogenetics), ethical and legal issues of the treatment of autoimmune encephalitis and mild encephalitis, neuroenhancement, patients’ autonomy, stigmatization of people with mental disorders, ethical and legal issues of compulsory treatments, ethical and legal issues of neuroimaging, forensic psychiatry, neurolaw, children’s rights in medicine, ethics of psychotherapy, and conceptual issues of psychiatry.

Besides ethical research topics, the empirical research is supported by team members with ethical competence. Of particular relevance are currently questions of data protection, data safety, data sharing, and the possibility to intensively survey the behavior of study participants. These issues are particularly relevant in smartphone-based prevention and intervention projects.

Furthermore, privacy issues are especially crucial in international projects with large scale prospective cohorts from several countries that assess the developmental trajectory of mental disorders. International cooperation is important to transfer research findings to different social and cultural contexts. However, data sharing across different national health care systems requires a careful consideration of different ethical and legal standards in research, data protection, data safety, patient care, respect for the rights of patients and study participants. For our cooperation with China, we have discussed ethical, legal and practical challenges with a focus on research participants in a recent publication (Liu et al. 2020). Our aim is to promote international cooperation by facilitating an exchange in relation to legal and practical approaches.

Selected publications in medical ethics and neuroethics

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Christen M, Müller S: The clinical and ethical practice of neuromodulation – Deep brain stimulation and beyond. Frontiers Research Topics Ebook 2017

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Liu S, Müller S, Dolan RJ, Zhao X, Zheng JC, Heinz A: Opportunities, risks and challenges in global mental health and population neuroscience: a case of Sino-German cooperation. European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience 2020

Müller S: Einfluss der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention auf die deutsche Rechtsprechung und Gesetzgebung zu Zwangsmaßnahmen. Fortschritte der Neurologie – Psychiatrie 2018, 86: 485-492

Müller S: Gute Gründe für Odysseus-Verfügungen. Ethik in der Medizin 2016, 28(3): 255-258

Müller S: Moral Enhancement durch Neurochirurgie? Machbarkeit und ethische Vertretbarkeit. Ethik in der Medizin 2018, 30(1): 39-56

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