

Episode: *Editorial Fellow Interview: “Regret Is Endemic to Surgical Professional Life and Navigating It Is a Skill”*

Guest: Kimberly E. Kopecky, MD, MS

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Editorial Fellow Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Kimberly E. Kopecky, a dual-boarded physician in general surgery and in hospice and palliative medicine and an assistant professor in the Division of Surgical Oncology at the Heersink School of Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She’s here to discuss her role as the editorial fellow curating the March 2025 issue of the Journal, [Regret in the Moral Psychology of Surgical Professionalism](#). Dr Kopecky, thank you for being here.

DR KIMBERLY KOPECKY: Thank you so much for having me. [music fades]

[00:00:48] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of this issue?

KOPECKY: Yeah, I think the main ethics point of this issue is to kind of highlight common experiences of regret that are encountered or navigated by surgeons. And the reason that I originally curated this theme issue was because I was nearing the transition from finishing my surgical training to starting in a junior faculty position, and I realized that though I had spent several years gaining the skills to make clinical decisions for patients and to do surgery, that I didn’t really have a solid sense of how I was going to navigate unwanted and unanticipated outcomes, particularly outcomes that resulted in feelings of regret. And so, I didn’t have—I looked and looked for, like, what can I read that will help teach me how to navigate regret? Because I know that this is something that I’m going to face for the rest of my profession and now, as the attending surgeon. So I couldn’t find anything, and so then I chose to work with the AMA for this theme issue. And I’m also hoping that it can be a resource for any health professions students or practicing clinicians as they themselves navigate their own experiences of regret.

[00:02:21] HOFF: And so, what should health professions students and trainees specifically be taking from this issue, perhaps to prepare them for that transition that you experienced from student to clinician?

KOPECKY: I’m hoping that we can take some of the tips and tricks that were suggested by the included authors. It’s been a real learning opportunity for me to see how other people navigate regret as surgeons or medical/health care professionals. And then I’m hoping also that the whole theme issue can kind of be a starting point for talking about how do we include this aspect of the

hidden curriculum almost in a purposeful way as we're training health professions students and specifically surgeons? How do we purposefully include this in or as a part of the training process, so that by the time that people graduate from surgical training programs that they have a sense of how they themselves might want to navigate regret?

[00:03:27] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to this issue, or perhaps just highlight something of particular importance for listeners, what would that be?

KOPECKY: Yeah, I think the primary point that I'd like to highlight or for the biggest takeaway to be is that this is normal. This is something that we all go through. Experiences of regret are, as the title suggests, endemic to the practice of surgery and the practice of medicine. I feel like...I think that when you experience, have an experience of regret, you have a reduced likelihood to reach out to colleagues or friends for support. And I'd really just first and foremost like to normalize that this happens because of the profession that we've chosen and that none of us are having these experiences in isolation. And then finally, I think also that this can be purposefully taught to our trainees so that they can have a healthier relationship with themselves as they navigate the realities of their chosen profession. [theme music returns]

[00:04:34] HOFF: Dr Kopecky, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and of course, thank you so much for all the work you put into this issue.

KOPECKY: Thank you so much. It was such a pleasure to be here. I really appreciate the opportunity.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.