

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Should Professional Resistance Be Integrated Into Conceptions of Professional Accountability?”*

Guest: Rachel Ellaway, PhD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author 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 Rachel Ellaway, a professor of community health sciences and the director of the Office of Health and Medical Education Scholarship in the Department of Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. She’s here to discuss her article, coauthored with Drs Lisa Graves and Tasha R. Wyatt, “*How Should Professional Resistance Be Integrated Into Conceptions of Professional Accountability?*,” in the March 2025 issue of the Journal, [*Regret in the Moral Psychology of Surgical Professionalism*](#). Dr Ellaway, thank you so much for being here.

DR RACHEL ELLAWAY: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

[music fades]

[00:00:57] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you and your coauthors are making in this article?

ELLAWAY: So for a while we’ve been promoting the idea of professional resistance, something that is embraced within the profession rather than being something rather shameful or sidelined. And we’ve been presenting a series of principles to make sure it’s not just resistance in any form, but resistance that actually does embrace professional boundaries and professional values. And one thing we realized we had missed out was that the professional resistance needs to be accountable. So, in this article, we make a case for the accountability and the necessity of accountability for professional resistance and the need for standards in support of that accountability.

[00:01:42] HOFF: And what should health professions students and trainees who are just sort of entering this professional realm take from this article?

ELLAWAY: Well, the key thing is that we want them to understand that they can engage in acts of resistance, and indeed many of them do, but they do it in a rather sort of freeform way because of the lack of standards and accountabilities. So we want to ground the idea of resisting in a professional environment. And given that many young people have many things that they are seeing as needing some form of resistance, then that they can do so in a way that guarantees that they are attending to their professional duties while still also meeting their moral requirements to

resist things that they see that are unjust or inappropriate. And to that end, the standards are needed so that the whole profession can embrace professional resistance without undermining its ability to function or undermining its basic ethical principles.

[00:02:43] HOFF: And finally, if you could add something to this article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

ELLAWAY: Well, one of the things that is challenging around accountability is the sense that it could be used to close down resistance. And to that end, the importance of having standards so that those who object to other health care professionals or health care trainees' resistance are themselves also accountable. And that's why we need standards that apply to everybody, so that accountability is not a dead hand on resistance, but in fact, an enabler. That it gives everybody an understanding of the perimeters within which we work, including when that involves professional resistance, to the point where trainees and practicing professionals can engage in resistance with an understanding of what their responsibilities are, but also what their abilities to try to affect change really are. [theme music returns] To that end, we see this as an enabling rather than a limiting step.

[00:03:44] HOFF: Dr Ellaway, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthors for your contribution to the Journal this month.

ELLAWAY: Thank you.

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*.