

Episode: *Author Interview: “Wavering on Branches of a Decision Tree”*

Guest: Lio Barnhardt

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 Lio Barnhardt, an interdisciplinary filmmaker, writer, and comic artist who is currently an undergraduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Illinois. Lio is here to discuss their comic, “*Decision Tree Comic*,” in the May 2025 issue of the Journal, [Private Equity in Health Care](#). Lio, thank you for being here.

LIO BARNHARDT: Yeah, thank you for having me. [music fades]

[00:00:42] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you’re making with this comic?

BARNHARDT: Well, I wanted to talk about decision making and risk management specifically for testing for BRCA, cancer screening. And I wanted to talk about how these choices are affected by the patient’s gender, age, internet literacy, access to information, just various different factors. My article, which takes the form of a comic, plays on the visual of the decision tree, which is a common visualization. And I wanted to express how this model is often used to simplify decisions and visualize them in a linear format. And I wanted to talk about how this chart, and decisions in general, are just not as simple as they might seem, and can in fact have a lot of different factors and offshoots and different problems that a patient might encounter while they’re deciding whether or not to screen.

[00:01:56] HOFF: And so, what’s the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to be taking from your comic?

BARNHARDT: Well, I think it’s very important to remember that all patients carry their own differences in decision making. They make decisions based on different factors. They all kind of have different thought processes. And one of the most important, I think, is internet literacy and access to information. For example, in my comic, I have two characters who have the biggest difference in age. So one of them is an older woman, one of them’s a younger woman, and their, probably their main difference is that the older patient is not as familiar with the internet, which makes the screening decision a lot more difficult because she is not as able to research information or is health literate while researching information, which makes that decision a lot harder and a lot more complicated. But it is also true that someone who is a lot younger, and someone capable of researching through the internet, still may find it difficult to just parse

through some of the language. And so, I think just, it's important to help patients make the most well-informed decisions as possible, keeping in mind the internet literacy problem.

[00:03:28] HOFF: And to wrap up, if you could add something to this comic that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

BARNHARDT: I think I would like to talk more about the weight of decision making that is placed on the patient that comes after the fact of the decision being made. I think a lot of cancer awareness culture can almost implicitly put blame on the patient if something goes wrong afterwards, or if their cancer progresses worse. Basically, if anything is unforeseen with their decision, it can almost be implied that they have made the wrong decision. And I think it's important to help patients make well-informed choices for themselves, but I think that there's a language problem that needs to be addressed when using the terms "right" and "wrong" in regards to decisions. [theme music returns] And so, I think I would probably speak more about that.

[00:04:32] HOFF: Lio, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thank you for your contribution to the Journal this month.

BARNHARDT: Yeah, 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](http://journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.