

Episode: *Author Interview: “Why Should Extinction Medicine Be a Specialty?”*

Guest: Devin M. Kellis, 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 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 Devin M. Kellis, a medical student at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, Columbia, where he received an MS in biomedical science. Devin is here today to discuss his article, “*Why Should Extinction Medicine Be a Specialty?*,” in the August 2025 issue of the Journal, [Existential Health Care Ethics](#). Devin, thanks for being here.

DEVIN KELLIS: Thanks for having me. [music fades]

[00:00:44] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of your article?

KELLIS: Yeah. So, the main point of this article is pretty straightforward, and it’s essentially that we do, in fact, need a new medical specialty to address the problem of human extinction, specifically applying medical ethics concepts and concepts from the harm reduction literature in order to manage that problem most effectively. As of now, there’s not any existing profession that has taken on the responsibility to deal with the problem of human extinction, and in my view, we can see extinction very similarly as we do death. And so, health care has always managed death for a very long time, but it’s really only in the past 250 years or so that we’ve come to understand the concept of extinction very well. And I think now it’s time for health care to begin managing that problem very similarly to how it’s done death.

[00:01:48] HOFF: And so, what should health professions students and trainees specifically be taking from this article?

KELLIS: I think one of the most important things they could take away from it is that human extinction is going to be a problem that is of increasing importance during our careers and throughout the 21st and future centuries. If you look on Google Ngram Viewer on the internet, you can see that the term “human extinction” has been increasing exponentially over the past decade or two. And I think that we have kind of a unique opportunity to figure out how to manage this problem effectively, and one of the things that I go into the article is outlining what some of the competencies could be for a new specialty of extinction medicine. Whether they be educational competencies, competencies in disaster medicine, or organized medicine, I think it’s important that we

figure out how exactly we can make sure that when we address the problem of extinction, we're actually improving the world and not doing more harm.

[00:02:54] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

KELLIS: Yeah, I think the most important point that I didn't fit into the article is that, one of the things kind of I mentioned a bit earlier in this podcast was the idea that the concept of human extinction itself can be harmful outside of there actually being any real risk. I'm not saying there's not a real risk. There seems like there very well could be, and there's many mechanisms that we know of that could cause extinction. But one of the things that I have come to think about a lot is the prospect that how individuals think about extinction can cause a lot of indirect harm to other people. So, for example, someone might perceive the risk of extinction in the near future as being incredibly high and make decisions on that basis that deprioritize the health of people alive today in order to protect future generations, or to ensure the survival of the human species.
[theme music returns]

[00:04:10] HOFF: Devin, thank you so much for your time on the podcast, and thanks for your contributions to the Journal this month.

KELLIS: Thanks for having me.

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*.