

Episode: *Author Interview: “Medicine, Futures, and the Prevention of Human Extinction”*

Guest: Bruce E. Tonn, 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 Bruce E. Tonn, president of Three3, Inc, a scientific and educational nonprofit located in Knoxville, Tennessee. He’s here to discuss his article, coauthored with Dr Christopher R. Tonn, “*Medicine, Futures, and the Prevention of Human Extinction*,” in the August 2025 issue of the Journal, [Existential Health Care Ethics](#). Dr Tonn, thank you so much for being here.

DR BRUCE TONN: Thank you so much for the invitation. [music fades]

[00:00:45] HOFF: So, what’s the main ethics point that you and your coauthor are making in this article?

TONN: The main point is that current generations have obligations to future generations, and that amongst many obligations that we have for our future generations is preventing human extinction. The health professions philosophy of doing no harm one patient at a time demonstrates an ethical commitment to future generations, in our opinion.

[00:01:13] HOFF: And so, what’s the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to be taking from your article?

TONN: I think it can be valuable for students and trainees to internalize that caring for individuals is also caring for their children and their grandchildren, and then eventually, also caring for future generations. They might consider working these ideas into their conversations with patients to build support for broader, top-down planning related to preventing human extinction.

[00:01:47] 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?

TONN: Well, we had a point in the original manuscript about palliative care. So the idea is, if humanity was actually facing extinction, what could health care do with respect to palliative care or other end-of-life care to help humanity deal with their impending extinction? [theme music returns]

[00:02:15] HOFF: Dr Tonn, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

TONN: You're very welcome, and thank you so much for having this discussion with 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*.