

Episode: *Author Interview: "What Would It Mean for Health Care Organizations to Justly Manage Their Waste?"*

Guest: Genevieve S. Silva

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Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

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 format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Genevieve Silva, a fourth-year medical student at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She's here to discuss her article, coauthored with Dr Cassandra Thiel, *What Would It Mean for Health Care Organizations to Justly Manage Their Waste?*, in the October 2022 issue of the Journal, [Health Care Waste](#). Genevieve, thank you so much for being on the podcast with me. [music fades]

GENEVIEVE SILVA: Thanks so much for having me.

HOFF: To begin with, what's the main ethics point that you and your coauthor are making in this article?

SILVA: Yeah. So, this article deals with the issue of waste generated by the practice of medicine by health care systems in terms of physical waste and carbon emissions. And the point of this article is to discuss how this very waste generation is unethical because of the downstream negative health impacts it has on patient populations. We often think of medicine's impact on patient health in terms of diseases being treated and the care they receive in the clinic or in the hospital, but the health care system actually generates a significant amount of waste. Before COVID, it was 14,000 tons per day. And downstream impacts can really create negative health outcomes in communities. For example, waste processing and disposal centers are often sited in communities with fewer resources, and the impact of emissions on global climate change, of course, has implications for almost every dimension of human health. So, this article really discusses how medical care and health care systems can mitigate some of these risks and more justly manage their waste. We get into things like waste audits and how collecting more data around emissions and waste generation can inform policy changes and identify areas for improvement.

We also talk about how waste can be reduced by implementing reusability practices, moving to third-party re-processors of instruments, for example, instead of single-use disposables, and we finally touch on how policy changes and this type of philosophical and framework shift within health care systems can be implemented in the most equitable way possible by really getting input from stakeholders across the board and all of the employees of health care systems who would be impacted by such changes.

HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees specifically to take from this article?

SILVA: I would really hope that health trainees and students take this opportunity to think outside of the box when they think about the Hippocratic Oath and the oath to do no harm and the principle of justice in patient care and to expand that beyond treating specific conditions of patients in clinic, and to think about how the health care system as a whole can better advocate for and protect public health by more justly managing its own waste and emissions.

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

SILVA: At the end of the article, we start to talk about policy change and the role for advocacy, and we mostly talked about it on a higher-level perspective around how health care systems themselves can be advocates in terms of using their purchasing power and how directors of departments can challenge hospital policies. But I would love to emphasize that it shouldn't be underestimated how important individual advocacy is and how critical it is to have sustainability champions within medical schools, within health care systems, within specific departments of hospitals who can really advocate for waste reduction and for sustainable changes and bring this issue to front of mind for administrators and just for the health care community as a whole, so that we can all work together to make changes that will eventually make health care waste more justly managed. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Genevieve, thank you so much for your time today on the podcast and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SILVA: Thanks very much.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of the October 2022 issue for free, visit our site [JournalofEthics.org](https://www.journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.