

# PhD program in Biomedical Ethics and Law at the University of Zurich

*Effy Vayena,  
Nikola Biller-Andorno*

Institute of Biomedical Ethics,  
University of Zurich

Preimplantation diagnosis, assisted suicide, rationing health care – ethical dilemmas arise frequently, if not steadily, in the context of modern clinical practice as well as in biomedical research. Similarly, complex ethical questions are entangled in health policy decision-making processes at the national and global level. Ethical challenges and primarily ethical pitfalls in modern medicine are almost daily making headlines. Public interest is not just due to the sensation that such issues generate, but also because those ethical challenges affect all of us, as physicians, patients, research volunteers, biomedical researchers, recipients of public health programs and members of our society.

Degrees in bioethics are often combined with biomedical law, health policy or public health. In Europe there are several masters programs in biomedical ethics but currently only a couple of doctoral programs leaving those interested in obtaining such advanced qualifications with limited options. The Institute of Biomedical Ethics (IBME) at the University of Zurich in collaboration with the University's Faculty of Law has recently established a new doctoral program in Biomedical Ethics and Law (PhD BmEL). The program has a structured curriculum responding to Bologna criteria and consists of two distinct tracks: the law track (PhD BmEL/law) coordinated by the Faculty of

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Biomedical ethics, the field that studies ethical questions in biomedicine has over the last decades become a well-established academic discipline. Biomedical ethics scholarship comprises identification of ethical dilemmas, application of conceptual analytical techniques, development of normative frameworks for problem solving, collection and interpretation of empirical data that can inform bioethical debates. The field continues to evolve and grow, mainly due to the increasing demand for expertise in this area. Such ethics expertise is needed in hospitals' clinical and research ethics committees, in national ethics committees, in various health-related organizations in the public and private sector.

Biomedical ethics programs of studies are available in many universities around the world with North American institutions taking the lead. Bioethics is taught at the undergraduate level, at masters and doc-

Law and focusing on medical and health law; and the medical track (PhD BmEL/med), coordinated by the IBME, with a focus on biomedical ethics.

The medical track is a three-year program. It accepts national and international candidates from various disciplines and aims at providing advanced training in both normative analyses of bioethical questions and empirical methodologies. To ensure international visibility and to increase the applicant pool, this track is an English language program. An additional feature of the program is its MD/PhD option available to medical students who are interested in pursuing the two degrees in parallel.

As a doctoral program the PhD BmEL/med is focused on training candidates in becoming independent researchers in this field. However, the program also includes a coursework component. Mandatory and elective courses are offered by local and international faculty. The coursework part has enough flexibility built in to allow students to develop a program of studies that best suits their individual needs. The first cohort of PhD students was accepted in the fall semester 2009. The majority of this cohort holds a medical degree. For the next cohort IBME has secured some fellowships for qualified candidates who wish to do research in the area of justice and health. The fellowship will be provided by the University Research Program in Ethics and the deadline is 31.1.2010. More information about the PhD BmEL/med as well as for funding opportunities can be found in the program's website [www.bmel.uzh.ch/med](http://www.bmel.uzh.ch/med).



Taking cells for preimplantation diagnosis.

Korrespondenz:  
Dr. Effy Vayena PhD  
BmEL PhD Scientific  
Coordinator  
Institut für Biomedizinische  
Ethik IBME  
Ethik-Zentrum  
der Universität Zürich  
Zollikerstrasse 115  
CH-8008 Zürich

[vayena@ethik.uzh.ch](mailto:vayena@ethik.uzh.ch)