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Principal Investigator	Virginia Sanchini
Affiliation	University of Milan
Title of the proposed project	Clinical Ethics in Oncology: Mapping Dilemmas, Conflicts, and Decision-Making Pathways
Short description of the project	<p>As the clinical-oriented branch of bioethics, clinical ethics aims to translate ethical principles and reflection into medical practice, applying ethical frameworks to concrete dilemmas and moral disagreements arising in the diagnosis and treatment of individual patients.</p> <p>Internationally, clinical ethics has been established for several decades as a recognized field. Yet, the landscape in Italy remains fragmented and heterogeneous, both in terms of clinical implementation and research. This fragmentation is also evident in that some specialties (e.g., intensive care, organ transplantation, and neurology) and ethical topics (e.g., end-of-life care) have received far more attention than others. In contrast, a substantial gap persists within the existing literature and clinical practice pertaining to oncology. When clinical ethics are considered within the oncological context, the focus tends to be predominantly confined to end-of-life issues, thereby neglecting the broader spectrum of ethical questions that emerge throughout the entire continuum of oncological care. This doctoral project seeks to address this gap by exploring the domain of clinical ethics in oncology. Through a combination of systematic literature review, qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups), and quantitative approaches (survey research), the project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map ethical issues in oncology, across the continuum of care—from diagnosis to treatment, prognosis communication, and end-of-life decisions. • Develop a taxonomy of ethical conflicts in oncological settings, distinguishing between intra-professional, interprofessional, and patient-provider conflicts. • Analyze ethical decision-making processes, focusing on how complex clinical decisions (e.g. treatment limitations, participation in clinical trials) are negotiated and communicated. <p>The results are expected to contribute both to the academic field of clinical ethics and to the development of practical tools and frameworks for healthcare professionals engaged in oncological practice.</p> <p>This research project will be carried out within the newly established Clinical Bioethics Unit at the Department of Oncology and Hemato-Oncology (DIPO), University of Milan (UNIMI), a vibrant multidisciplinary hub that brings together leading researchers and faculty from the most prominent oncology centers across Milan and the Lombardy region.</p> <p>The selected candidate will have the unique opportunity to conduct field research in collaboration with world-class hospitals</p>

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	and research institutes affiliated with DIPO—most notably, the European Institute of Oncology (IEO) and the National Cancer Institute of Milan (INT), both internationally recognized for excellence in cancer care and research.
Main research area for the project	Medical Humanities
Second research area for the project	
3 key words for project	Bioethics, clinical ethics, cancer
Main topic/s of the lab	<p>Research in bioethics is coordinated by the <u>Clinical Bioethics Unit</u>, and is structured around four main thematic areas.</p> <p>1. Ethics in Oncological Practice The first area focuses on ethical issues in clinical oncology, with particular attention to breast and prostate cancer care and the challenges posed by the treatment of rare cancers (in particular sarcomas and head&neck cancers). This line of research examines how ethical frameworks can guide decision-making in complex and emotionally charged care scenarios.</p> <p>2. Ethics of Clinical Trials and Precision Oncology The second area investigates the ethical, methodological, and regulatory implications of precision oncology, with a focus on how emerging technologies—especially Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning—are reshaping cancer research. This line explores how innovation challenges traditional ethical paradigms in clinical experimentation. Within this second area, the concept of vulnerability in research ethics and enrolment of vulnerable populations in research is also explored.</p> <p>3. Patient Engagement and Advocacy Closely connected to clinical research, this research area addresses the promotion of patient engagement and advocacy in healthcare. It explores strategies aimed at empowering patients and ensuring their voices contribute meaningfully to clinical research, healthcare policy, and care planning.</p> <p>4. Ethics of Vulnerability and Emerging Technologies in Aged Care The final area focuses on the ethical dimensions of vulnerability in the aging population, especially in relation to the use of emerging technologies such as wearable devices, robotics, virtual reality, and smart home systems. This theme is at the core of the ElderTech project (“Emerging Technologies and Vulnerabilities in Aged Care”), a three-year research initiative funded by the Cariplo Foundation, which continues to explore how innovation can both support and challenge the dignity and autonomy of older adults.</p>
Short description of the lab activity	Housed within the Department of Oncology and Hemato-Oncology (DIPO) at the University of Milan—one of Italy’s

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	<p>leading centers for cancer research and care—the Clinical Bioethics Unit reflects the department’s strong interdisciplinary ethos.</p> <p>Bringing together experts from diverse academic and clinical backgrounds, the Unit is committed to advancing the following core objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training in bioethics, with a focus on clinical ethics and research ethics; • Ethics consultation and clinical support for healthcare professionals working in DIPO-affiliated research and treatment centers; • Development of ethical guidelines and policy tools tailored to oncology and hematology practice; • Research in clinical and research ethics, with a particular emphasis on oncological settings; • Ethics advisory work on Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues (ELSI) in the context of national and international research projects. <p>By integrating research, education, and clinical practice, the Unit aims to foster ethical awareness and promote ethically responsible innovation in oncology and beyond.</p>
Recent bibliography	<p>Grigis A, Beretta G, Borry P, Sanchini V (last and corresponding author) (2025) Vulnerability in research ethics: A systematic review of policy guidelines and documents. PLoS One 20(6): e0327086.</p> <p>Cincidda C, Sanchini V, Pravettoni G. (2025) Moral conflicts among patients-caregivers dyads in oncological care pathway: a systematic review of the ethical literature. Support Care Cancer.;33(7):548. doi: 10.1007/s00520-025-09548-w. PMID: 40474016; PMCID: PMC12141141.</p> <p>A. Fasoli, G. Beretta, G. Pravettoni, V. Sanchini (2023) Mapping Emerging Technologies in aged care: Results from an in-depth online research. BMC Health Services Research 23, 528. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-023-09513-5</p> <p>Sanchini V., Sala R., Gastmans C., The concept of vulnerability in aged care: a systematic review of argument-based ethics literature. BMC Med Ethics 23, 84 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-022-00819-3</p> <p>Crico C., Sanchini V. (corresponding author), Casali P.G., Pravettoni G., (2020) Evaluating the effectiveness of clinical ethics committees: a systematic review. Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-020-09986-9.</p>
Group composition	<p>The Clinical Bioethics Unit has been established by Gianluca Vago (full professor of pathology and Director of the Department</p>

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	of Oncology and Hemato-Oncology), Paolo Giovanni Casali (associate professor of medical oncology, and Director of the University-Affiliated Complex Structure of Medical Oncology 2 at the National Cancer Institute – IRCCS Foundation), and Virginia Sanchini (tenure track assistant professor in bioethics and history of medicine).
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