Bioethics Glossary of Terms: Quick Reference

**Autonomy** – The ability to make a choice or take an action that determines what will happen to one’s self.

**Beneficence** – The duty to “do good,” to act so as to benefit, or to assure that actions provide more benefit than harm.

**Bioethics** – The application of ethical principles, values, and methods to problems or dilemmas that occur in healthcare.

**Capacity** – The ability to give informed consent.

**Casuistry** – An approach used to identify general moral rules by analyzing specific cases.

**Confidentiality** – The maintenance of the patient’s privacy about his/her medical condition.

**Durable power of attorney for healthcare** – A legal document that conveys decision-making rights for healthcare to another individual of the patient’s choosing whenever the patient loses the capacity to make decisions.
Ethics – The study of how we ought to live our lives to achieve fulfillment and meaning.


Futility – A situation in which providers believe that continued use of a therapy will not achieve its intended end. Non-beneficial.


Integrity – Wholeness of character and adherence to moral values.


Justice – Fair, equitable, and appropriate treatment in light of what is one’s due.


Living will – A legal document that expresses the patient’s wishes to forgo life-sustaining treatment.


Nonmaleficence – The fundamental duty to refrain from harm, or if harm is unavoidable, to assure that the harm of the proposed action is outweighed by benefit.


Palliative sedation – The lowering of patient consciousness using medications for the express purpose of limiting patient awareness of suffering that are intractable and intolerable.


Veracity – Scrupulous truth-telling, the strict duty not to intentionally deceive.

Honesty.