United Kingdom
Medical Ethics and Health Policy in London

In the recent past, the United States has treated health care as a market commodity, while the United Kingdom has considered it a sacred element in its welfare state. This stark contrast dates from 1948, but roots of the different health care systems were evident almost 200 years ago. Today, important elements of this contrast appear to be dissolving as both countries struggle to deliver equitable and affordable services that meet public expectations. Policy experts in the U.K. have looked to U.S. market principles as a basis for making substantial changes in the British National Health Service (NHS). At the same time, many in the U.S. believe we should draw on the philosophy of the NHS to help us reform health care in our country.

In both cases, very substantial health reform has been undertaken, and it is proving to be controversial. We will study how the NHS functions and how it came to be what it is today. We will compare the NHS with the U.S. health care system and examine ethical issues that arise when we assess their differences, particularly those concerning allocation of resources. We will also deal with ethical questions related to decision-making in genetics and reproductive health.

This course, then, is an interdisciplinary exploration of the politics, ethics and philosophy of health and health care in the UK and the United States. We address the following questions:

- How should health reform be done to both increase access and control health costs?
- How do we best allocate our resources to provide just and efficient health care?
- What social values should govern clinical and policy decisions related to genetics and reproduction?
- Why and how have the U.S. and the U.K. dealt with these issues so differently?
- How have science and technology altered the relationship between health care workers and the public over the past 40 years?

This annual summer course is offered by the Center for Ethics in Life Sciences and Humanities.