

PRESS RELEASE

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Berlin, 17 May 2017

Ethics Council hears experts concerning “benevolent coercion” in child and youth services as well as in nursing and services for the disabled

On Thursday, 18 May 2017, the German Ethics Council is conducting a public expert hearing on the topic of coercion in child and youth services in Berlin. A further hearing on the topic of coercion in nursing and services for the disabled is taking place one day later on 19 May 2017. Those who are interested can follow both hearings through the live audio stream and comment online.

The German Ethics Council is currently preparing an Opinion on what role coercive measures play in fields of practice such as psychiatry, nursing, social work, child and youth services as well as services for the disabled; to what extent this is ethically and legally problematic; and what need for change exists in practical fields and their legal regulation. In focus for the Ethics Council are those coercive measures that are conducted against the will of the affected persons (“self-determination”) on the grounds of their self-protection (so-called benevolent coercion).

The object of the hearing on 18 May will be coercive measures that are applied in child and youth services, for example in the form of liberty-depriving measures, but also in the guise of forced medication and other coercive treatments, contact bans as well as the use of reward and punishment systems and similar restrictive pedagogical measures. In the course of the hearing, the German Ethics Council would like to enquire about experiences with forms of benevolent coercion in child and youth services; discuss the state of research in this area; and debate measures for promoting the self-determination of children and adolescents as well as control mechanisms for coercive measures and possible alternatives. The German Ethics Council will gather expertise from educational science, law, administrative practice and sample institutions, but will also survey affected youths. For the protection of the affected persons, their consultation will not take place publicly.

The hearing on 19 May is dedicated to coercive measures in nursing and services for the disabled to which mainly persons with high requirements for support and/or care are exposed. Particularly very old and severely ill persons, as well as those with severe physical or cognitive disabilities, are affected in these areas by measures such as forced care; involuntary commitment in homes for persons with disabilities or in nursing homes; measures restricting freedom; diagnostic and therapeutic coercive measures; measures for care conducted under compulsion, for instance, those concerning personal hygiene, intake of food or liquids; as well as reward and punishment systems from behavioural psychology. With the help of the hearing, the German Ethics Council would like to look into the different manifestations of benevolent coercion in nursing and

German Ethics Council

The German Ethics Council shall pursue the ethical, social, scientific, medical and legal questions and the anticipated consequences for the individual and society that result in connection with research and development, especially in the field of the life sciences and their application to humankind. The German Ethics Council has 26 members who are appointed for a period of four years by the President of the German Bundestag, half on the proposal of the German Bundestag and half on the proposal of the Federal Government.

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Press contact

Ulrike Florian
 Phone: +49 (0)30/203 70-246
 Fax: +49 (0)30/203 70-252
 Email: florian@ethikrat.org

Office

Jaegerstr. 22/23
 D-10117 Berlin
 Phone: +49 (0)30/203 70-242
 Fax: +49 (0)30/203 70-252
 Email: kontakt@ethikrat.org
 Internet: www.ethikrat.org

services for the disabled as well as to establish the factors that are decisive for their presence. Since the nursing and care personnel in these areas especially frequently refer to structural conditions in order to legitimize the exercise of coercion, also at stake is the question of how structures can be changed so that certain coercive measures can be abstained from. In the framework of the hearing, experts from rehabilitation pedagogy, general medicine and sample institutions as well as representatives from associations for relatives and for affected persons have a chance to speak.

Previously on 23 February, the Ethics Council addressed forms of coercion in psychiatry in the course of an initial hearing and sought to that end the expertise of persons affected, relatives and professional actors.

Regarding all three fields of practice, moreover, the German Ethics Council is conducting an online survey in which all persons and institutions with an interest in the topic can participate until 31 May 2017.

Further Information (in German):

Hearing on Coercion in Psychiatry, 23 February 2017:
<http://www.ethikrat.org/veranstaltungen/anhoerungen/zwang-in-der-psihiatrie>

Hearing on Coercion in Child and Youth Services, 18 May 2017:
<http://www.ethikrat.org/veranstaltungen/anhoerungen/zwang-in-der-kinder-und-jugendhilfe>

Hearing on Coercion in Nursing and Services for the Disabled, 19 May 2017:
<http://www.ethikrat.org/veranstaltungen/anhoerungen/zwang-in-der-pflege-und-behindertenhilfe>

Online Survey:
<http://www.ethikrat.org/arbeitsprogramm/oeffentliche-befragung>