

The Birth of Medical Dramaturgy - On the Occasion of the Published Book of Academician Benjamin Djulbegovic: "An Impossible Decision - the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty"

Izet Masic

¹Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine. University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

²Bosnian Academy of Sciences and Arts "Kulin ban", Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

³Academy of Medical Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Corresponding author: Professor Emeritus Izet Masic, MD, PhD. WAAS, EASA, IAHSI, ACMI, EFMI. Faculty of Medicine. University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
E-mail: izetmasic@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9080-5456>.

doi: 10.5455/aim.2023.31.151-153

ACTA INFORM MED. 2023 JUN 31(2): 151-153

Received: MAY 05, 2023

Accepted: JUN 25, 2023

ABSTRACT

Background: The book "An Impossible Decision - the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty" has been published by Avicena Publisher in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023 - ISBN: 978-9958-720-76-5. **Objective:** The aim of this article is to analyze what is the most rational and ethical way to treat people facing life-and-death decisions and how do we exactly communicate these inevitable uncertainties that all of us will sooner or later face? **Methods:** Author of the book shows real-life relevance to patients often left alone to make these difficult decisions. Using the techniques of medical dramaturgy, this text brilliantly bridges science. **Results and Discussion:** The author of the book explained and proposed how to educate the public on how medical advances are made and how inferences and evidence are generated and appraised - in the best tradition of evidence-based medicine while highlighting uncertainties and inevitable trade-offs that accompany science, policies, and personal choices in the attempt to arrive at most satisfactory decisions. In addition to the general public, this play's important audiences are students and faculty in humanities disciplines and medical schools. These students are required to read many dense scientific, philosophical, and technical writings (many of which are referenced/annotated in the footnotes in the play). The play provides an exceptional teaching tool, which includes over 35 theoretical concepts to show how they can be applied to decisions relevant to all of us and what shared decision-making entails. **Conclusion:** Author's answer on the question "How to make the life and death medical decisions?" coul'd and shoul'd be: The method of using a playwright and Socrates dialogue format to connect the science of uncertainty with personal humanity decision will be appropriate. It will be important and quiet usefull for phisicians and, also, patients in healthcare practice, as joined decision makers.

Keywords: Birth of Medical Dramaturgy, Uncertainty, Decision Making.

1. ABOUT THE BOOK: "AN IMPOSSIBLE DECISION - THE LIFE INTERRUPTED BY UNCERTAINTY"

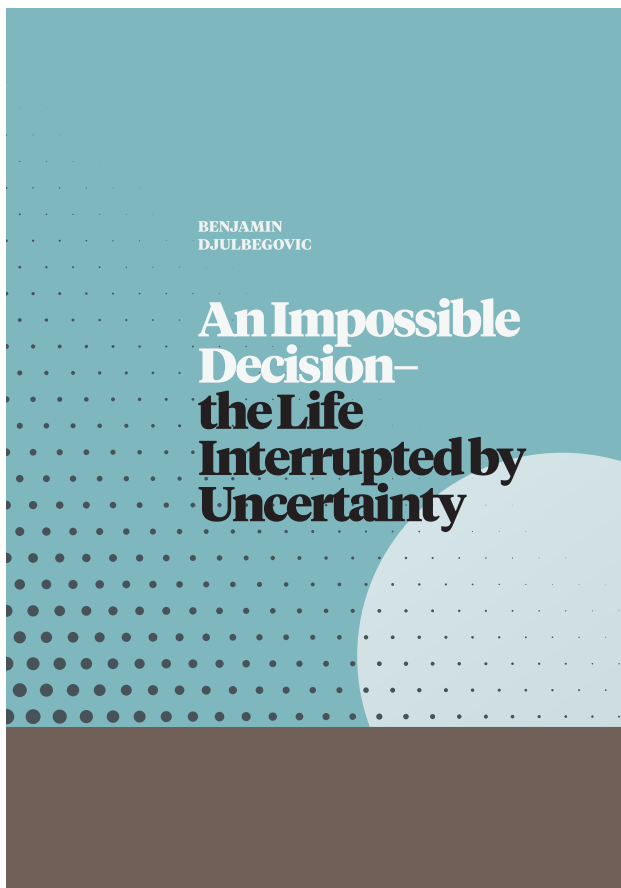
The book "An Impossible Decision - the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty" has been published by Avicena Publisher in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023 - ISBN: 978-9958-720-76-5.. Editor of the book is Academician Izet Masic, Professor Emeritus of the University of Sarajevo, former Chief of Cathedras of Family Medicine and Medical Informatics at Faculty of Medicine, University of Sarajevo, and former Professor of Health Management and Social Medicine and Health

Care Organization at University of Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina (1).

What is important to say. It has been said that science is about articulating and responding to uncertainties. In clinical medicine, these uncertainties typically revolve around diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. The science of uncertainty has tremendously advanced during the last couple hundred years, particularly during the previous 20 to 30 years. This has allowed ever better descriptions, explanations, and predictions of the effect of disease and treatment in group and individual patients alike. But uncertainty is theoretically impossible to eliminate. This

© 2023 Izet Masic

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



creates enormous scientific and ethical problems for all our patients -what should the physicians and patients working together do when they face uncertainty, particularly life-threatening events? What is the most rational and ethical way to treat people facing life-and-death decisions? How do we exactly communicate these inevitable uncertainties that all of us will sooner or later face? A novel approach to this decades-old problem is to employ a technique of dramaturgy defined as “adapting a story to actable form” [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramaturgy>] to provide a narrative reflecting the current Zeitgeist of patient-physician relationship viewed through the lens of dramatization of medical uncertainties that colors this relationship (1-3).

Building on decades of the science of uncertainty, Dr Djulbegovic has converted a huge amount of literature into a Socrates dialogue and playwright format to show how the seemingly esoteric multiple theoretical concepts have relevant, real-life implications. The result is a unique text [An Impossible Decision—the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty], presented as a drama in two acts where the main protagonist- Lisa, a 45 woman who suddenly finds her life interrupted by pancreatic cancer - has to navigate all unknowns in the face of life-threatening disease.

2. WHAT MESSAGES THE BOOK TELLING TO THE READERS

There are thousands technical papers offering various mathematical and statistical insights on handling medical uncertainties. However, none of these papers shows real-life relevance to patients often left alone to make these difficult decisions. Using the techniques of medical dramaturgy, this text

brilliantly bridges science (“the law of medical discovery”) with ethics to offer a solution to the ever-elusive “triple ethical aim”- arriving at a decision that respects the right of a person to decide as an autonomous human being, has the best possible chances to personally benefit from the treatments under consideration, while contributing to knowledge that can help others in the future.

3. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PATIENTS IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN THE DISEASES TREATMENT

By publishing this text, we hope to reach a much wider audience than it is possible using technical, scientific papers. In particular, we aim to educate the public on how medical advances are made and how inferences and evidence are generated and appraised - in the best tradition of evidence- based medicine while highlighting uncertainties and inevitable trade-offs that accompany science, policies, and personal choices in the attempt to arrive at most satisfactory decisions. The audience for this play consists of all people touched by cancer- as patients, their loved ones, healers, or policy-makers- literally millions of people worldwide. In addition to the general public, this play’s important audiences are students and faculty in humanities disciplines and medical schools. These students are required to read many dense scientific, philosophical, and technical writings (many of which are referenced/annotated in the footnotes in the play). The play provides an exceptional teaching tool, which includes over 35 theoretical concepts to show how they can be applied to decisions relevant to all of us and what shared decision- making entails. We also encourage the theaters and movie producers to enact the play on the stages anywhere in the world and/ or adapt for the movie.

4. CONCLUSION

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first attempt to use medical dramaturgy as the format to seek the convergence between the natural sciences and humanities in the great tradition of the search for Consilience- the unity of knowledge. We hope other publishers and journals will follow suit.

Author’s answer on the question “How to make the life and death medical decisions?” coul’d and shoul’d be: The method of using a playwright and Socrates dialogue format to connect the science of uncertainty with personal humanity decision will be appropriate. It will be important and quiet usefull for physicians and, also, patients in healthcare practice, as joined decision makers. The future, maybe, can show it.

5. ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

Benjamin Djulbegovic is a Professor of Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC. His primary academic and research interest lies in attempts to measure and optimize clinical research and practice of medicine by understanding the nature of medical evidence and decision-making. To this effect, his work aims to close the translational research circle by integrating methods and techniques across evidence-based medicine (EBM), predictive analytics, health outcome research, and decision sciences with the goals of reducing overuse, underuse, and misuse of delivery of health services to improve patients’ health outcomes.

The role of uncertainty and rationality in science and clin-

ical medicine has been one of the common themes across his work, particularly evident in his analysis of equipoise and the role of regret. Dr. Djulbegovic has systematically applied the science of EBM and decision analysis to the entire fields of hematology and oncology that resulted in two books; the book on “Reasoning and decision-making in hematology” was listed as one of the best books by J Natl Cancer Inst and the book “Decision Making in Oncology. Evidence-based management” was assessed as “one of the first and best attempts to apply an evidence-based approach to the practice of medical oncology”. Most recently, he has completed a new book on “Threshold Models For Decision-Making in Clinical Medicine” where he dealt with the central tension to human rationality – a relation between scientific evidence, which exists on the continuum, and decision-making, action, which is categorical (we decide to act or not act). In doing so, Dr. Djulbegovic has linked the key precepts of moral philosophy with the theory of rational choice in an attempt to offer a solution to the ever-elusive “triple ethical aim”- arriving at a decision that respects the right of a person to decide as an autonomous human being, has the best possible chances to personally benefit from the treatments under consideration while contributing to knowledge that can help others in the future.

As of June 2023, he has published over 400 papers in peer-review journals, 196 abstracts, and numerous book chapters. He also received numerous awards for his work, which has also been published in major scientific and medical journals, including Nature, Lancet, JAMA, New England Journal

of Medicine, Annals of Internal Medicine, BMJ etc. He has also widely taught these subjects. During the last 25 years, Dr. Djulbegovic has received continuous external funding from both federal and private entities. He was also selected in Newsweek’s list of Top Cancer Doctors and, since 2011 continuously been selected among 1% of top US doctors by the US News & World Report in the field of hematology. His current h-index is 75, and he has been regularly included in the top 1% cited scientists worldwide.

- **Author’s contributions:** The author was involved in all steps of the preparation this review, including final proofreading of the text before publishing it.
- **Conflict of interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study of any kind.
- **Financial support and sponsorship:** Nil.

REFERENCES

1. Masic I. How to Make Life and Death Medical Decisions? On the Occasion of Play/Drama as Health Care Protection Method of Decision Making Using by Patients with Pancreatic Cancer. *Med Arch.* 2023; 77(3): 170-172. doi: 10.5455/medarh.2023.77.170-172.
2. Djulbegovic B. An Impossible Decision - the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty. Avicena. Sarajevo, 2023, 78 pages. ISBN: 978-9958-720-76-5.
3. Djulbegovic B. An Impossible Decision – the Life Interrupted by Uncertainty. *Int J Biomed Healthc.* 2022; 10(4): 274-302. doi: 10.5455/ijbh.2022.10.274-302.