

## From the Editors

The concerns and conflicts that prompted the United States to adopt the Patient Self-Determination Act—the subject of our *Special Section* in this second issue of *CQ*—have a great deal of relevance everywhere, as they epitomize the social concerns impacting on healthcare today. Medicine's extreme specialization and reliance on complex technology have resulted in the alienation of both patient and caregiver. At the same time the desire to maintain some kind of control and choice regarding our lives is increasing, many more people at some point in their lives become dependent upon technology and incapable of fully participating in their healthcare decisions. These trends, as Jos Welie pointed out in our premiere issue, prompted an attempt to solve a complex moral dilemma with a legal solution.

The Patient Self-Determination Act, which became law in the United States on 1 December 1991, provides a first step for dealing with these issues. It is not, however, a miracle cure. The authors of this legislation did acknowledge that there are substantial problems in this arena and recognized that there is no way to make these problems turn from water to wine or some other blessed outcome. Even so, the difficulties are turning out to be much broader and deeper than anticipated. Our examination of the Patient Self-Determination Act begins with this issue of *CQ* and will continue as experience accumulates.

We also introduce some new regular features with this issue. Although ethics committees have a number of important functions, such committees are most distinctively fulfilling their role when pressed to participate in choices about ethical values. In *Ethics Committees at Work*, *CQ* will regularly present real cases that have been brought before committees and analyzed by consultants and other committees.

As most committees are relatively new and still operate in relative isolation, networks of ethics committees are springing up in many areas. Such networks provide a means for sharing the wealth of experience and expertise being independently developed by committees, and through *Network News* we will work toward the establishment of a "network of networks."

*Abstracts of Note* is presented in response to the natural law that the number of publications expands to meet the needs of paper recyclers. The bioethics literature is no exception; as the field really becomes multidisciplinary, an increasing number of important manuscripts are appearing outside of "traditional" bioethics journals, and even the number of bioethics publications is increasing faster than any one person can hope to absorb. This section will provide succinct summaries of relevant and interesting papers, along with editorial commentary. Likewise, *Through the Looking Glass* surveys evolving trends and forces in bioethics as reflected at

the many major meetings and conferences taking place around the world.

Finally, *The Caduceus in Court* will discuss legal topics and developments important to healthcare ethics committees. Rather than providing simply a description of what courts have decided, the primary intent of this section will be to identify significant issues that are likely

to fall into the domain of our committees in the form of real life patient care decisions.

We hope our readers will find much of both interest and practical applicability in these pages, and we invite your comments and suggestions regarding anything *CQ* has published—or that you would like to see published.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

## Bioethics in a Changing World International Symposium and Certificate Program

Cambridge, England  
August 9–14, 1992

Presented by Girton College, Cambridge University and  
the International Bioethics Institute

The Symposium brings together scholars from medicine, philosophy, law, theology, and public policy to share their perspectives on vital moral, technological, and social problems that threaten individuals, societies, and the planet.

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Participants in the Symposium who are also interested in research may apply to the Certificate in International Bioethics Program. The certificate program builds on the post-graduate curriculum offered in the Symposium sessions and provides formal recognition for individuals committed to professional involvement in the practice of applied ethics within an international context. The certificate signifies successful completion of the week of meeting sessions, forums in Cambridge, and a research project under the tutelage of British, European, and American faculty.

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