Competition in Medical Ethics

The journal set a competition based on the case history which follows.

Participants were asked to answer the question: What are Patricia Green's responsibilities to Phillip Green: are they those of a wife to a husband or of a woman to a stranger?

Answers were to be in the form of three perspectives, for instance of a social worker, Patricia Green and a philosopher, each of the three to be of 500–700 words, or in the form of a case conference.

The two papers which follow, Would it have been better had he died? and Persons and values are the joint winners of the competition. The five judges decided to divide the prize of £100 between the two winners.

Three other entries were also commended and the writers of each of these will receive a year’s free subscription to the journal. They are: Sue Wall, Law Lecturer at the Polytechnic of Wolverhampton; Vivienne Wachenje who has a Diploma in Medical Ethics and Laws, works as a Welfare Assistant in Special Educational Needs and in September will begin to teach law, philosophy and ethics on a BSc Nursing Course (pending validation); and M A Cope who is in the final year of his PhD research course in Theology at Birmingham University.

Thanks also to a pseudonymous correspondent who, while not interested in entering the competition, wrote that she had been in more or less the same circumstances described in the case history.

Among other things, she pointed out that what a spouse might say in such frustrating circumstances might be very different from what she meant and that far more than philosophical analysis or moral advice, it was sympathy and practical help in meeting her responsibilities to her ill husband that she, at any rate, had most wanted.

Editor

Case history

Phillip Green is a 62-year-old British Leyland worker who takes early retirement. He enjoys his retirement, is active and helpful in the home, considerate to his wife and on good terms with his large family. His main hobby is gardening, and over the years he has won many prizes for his dahlias. In the year after retiring he does particularly well and wins more prizes than ever before.

Phillip and his wife are also keen dancers. On Friday and Saturday nights they go down to the local club, dance and chat. Mr Green is a popular and sociable man and the couple are well liked.

On Sunday Mr Green and his wife go to morning service at their local Anglican church. For Sunday lunch they usually visit one of their three children, and particularly like playing with their grandchildren whom they are inclined to spoil.

A year after retiring he has a stroke which leaves him with a mild left-sided hemiplegia. He is able to hobble around indoors. His speech is normal.

Following the stroke his character is markedly different. He is morose and introspective. His only activity is to sit and think about the past. He is demanding of his wife, treating her like a servant. He loses interest in his gardening and no longer goes down to the club. When his friends call on him he usually shows little interest in them although occasionally he enjoys talking with them about the past. He finds his grandchildren irritating, and the weekly visits for Sunday lunch have ceased to be a pleasure either for his wife or for his children. All are glad when the time comes for them to depart.

He is unaware of the change either in his role or his character.

His wife, Patricia Green, tells the social worker that she no longer wishes to look after her husband. She says: 'It is like being married to a stranger; it would have been better had he died'.
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