PostScript

LETTERS

The Roman Catholic Church and embryonic stem cells

Skene and Parker raise a number of concerns about religious doctrine unduly influencing law and public policy through amicus curiae contributions to civil litigations or direct lobbying of politicians. Oakley picks this up in an essay with an emphasis on the Roman Catholic Church’s interest in preventing the destruction of embryos for embryonic stem cell research. Skene, Parker, and Oakley seem to be concerned mostly with religious views having undue influence on public policy. My concern is the negative effect that such Church influenced public policy may have on the progress of the biomedical research that is itself foundational to the debate. Oakley seems to be particularly incensed that, as he puts it: “Those who support a total ban on embryonic stem cell research sometimes talk as if theirs are the only views based on moral principle”. What seems to be at issue here though are not the moral principles of the sanctity and dignity of human life, but the application of those moral principles to biomedical research.

The Roman Catholic Church has historically defended the sanctity and dignity of human life to varying degrees at different times. Human life for much of the past 2000 years was defined by the Church as the presence of the soul, which was thought at different times to appear at various different stages during development. Only recently, with the advent of modern biology, has the Roman Catholic Church shifted its position to claim that the fertilised egg also qualifies as the right sort of human life. It should be noted that this doctrinal change was fundamentally driven by developments in our understanding of embryology and not the process of ensoulment. The Church’s current position on the embryo is thus based not solely on Church doctrine but also on a specific interpretation of our empirical observations of human development. It is the Church’s interpretation of the biology of early human development that is foundational to their current stand against experimentation on early embryos. However one of the reasons we may wish to experiment on early embryos is that we know surprisingly little about them. In fact any position that claims to be based on a solid, empirical understanding of the embryo is misleading, as we simply do not have the data available. The reply to this will inevitably be that we know enough about embryos to make certain claims. For example the Roman Catholic Church likes to point out that the early embryo is obviously the earliest stage of a human life, and thus attributes to it many of the characteristics associated with actual people. Many would disagree with this on the grounds that the Church has confused being merely human with being a person. I am concerned by the claim that the early embryo is obviously the early stages of a human life.

My concern is not that the claim isn’t obvious to some people but that obviousness is a dangerous thing when it comes to science. It is, for example, quite obvious to me that I am currently sitting at my desk. Empirically my senses seem to confirm that I am more or less stationary. I may well believe that I am standing up or that I am moving. In human history we believed the earth to be stationary at the centre of the universe. This assumption was confirmed in the Western world by the Church itself. Church doctrine confirmed that the earth was the centre of the universe with the heavens above and hell below. When Galileo challenged this view by promoting the sun centred Copernican system of the Church attempted to silence him. The Church’s attack on Galileo and Copernicism was tripartite. Firstly, the Copernican system appeared to contradict some scriptures. Secondly, the Copernican system contradicted the Church sanctioned science of the day represented by Aristotelian physics. Thirdly, was the appeal to obviousness or the immediate evidence of the senses. Of the three, only the scriptural objections were fundamental to their theory of the universe. The Church’s choice of position is more or less based on the facts. The Church has sanctioned that view for centuries. The reply to this will be that a researcher’s actions and observations are most likely to be influenced by their personal views. However this is not a scientific problem as such views are no basis for the empirical evidence that is presented in support of the claim. The Church’s religious fervour for the early embryo is most obvious in the way that it has chosen to act to prevent its derivation.

The situation 400 years ago regarding Copernicism thus seems to be very similar to that today regarding the status of the early embryo. The Roman Catholic Church tried to prevent Galileo from conducting empirical evidence using his telescope and disseminating his empirical evidence by banning his books. Similarly the Church today has attempted to prevent the gathering of empirical data on the early embryo by promoting a ban on all experimentation on early embryos. The Copernican revolution itself has become a paradigm for the process of theory change in science. Science is not simply a collection of results from experiments (or facts) but perhaps more importantly science is the interpretation of those results and the planning of further experiments. For all its claims of objectivity science is, so the philosophers of science tell us, essentially a theoretical construct. The practical and theoretical sides of science are of course intimately connected. In fact it is well known that a researcher’s actions and observations are most likely to be influenced by their own hopes and expectations. These same researchers develop the theories that they use to interpret their data. These theories fit the results or facts) that have been previously observed and predict new experiments to be done. The role of theory at this stage of the process is often underestimated. Theories do not fall out of results. In fact in biology especially theories are often essential to making sense of what is known (result) and what is noise (artefact). Theory then is not just a bridge to the next fact or experiment but arguably the very heart and soul of science. Theories that do not fit the facts are of no use and should be discarded. But in biology especially, theories can define what counts as a fact and what does not. Sooner or later a startling new observation is made that cannot be accommodated within the existing theoretical framework. New theories are developed and past observations are re-categorised. What was written off as noise is heralded as fact. Thomas Kuhn called this paradigm shift and his paradigmatic case was the Copernican revolution. One overarching theoretical construct is replaced with another—our understanding of the world is literally changed forever.

A problem arises when an organisation such as the Roman Catholic Church erects its doctrinal structure on the shaky foundations of a specific theoretical construct. Biology and developmental biology in particular has comparatively young sciences that are progressing rapidly and are thus quite theoretically diverse. By lending its support to a certain theory or position within biology the Church may well be able to displace the balance that exists in science whereby theories are valued for their explanatory power or instrumental use, not their doctrinal compatibility. External interest groups with political lobbying power may thus hijack the antecedent process of progress in science with dire consequences for future advancement in science and medicine. The Roman Catholic Church’s influence on science is indirect and usually through the medium of public opinion and public policy. As we have seen in the American debate over the status of the embryo with regards to the derivation of embryonic stem cells this influence may be decisive in the formation of public policy. Indeed President Bush’s decision to effectively ban public funding of embryonic stem cell research in America is widely believed to have set back progress in the field worldwide by many years.

The Roman Catholic Church’s input into the embryonic stem cell debate has not been simply moral or ethical as one might assume but has openly defended a particular claim about the biology of the early embryo. Given the basic lack of empirical evidence regarding the embryo and such developments as the unexpected properties of stem cells the Roman Catholic Church’s choice of position on the biology of the embryo seems to be chosen solely as a prop for its doctrinal position. This prop has then been introduced into the secular debate on the status of the embryo as a somehow obvious empirical claim.

I believe the Church’s religious fervour for its preferred doctrinal and scientific position of the day is fundamentally at odds with the process and progress of science. Science is an exploration of the physical world that is characterised by continuous reinterpretation, and, historically at least, major shifts in understanding. Over the last 400 years the Roman Catholic Church has been slow to accept that science progresses at all and has proceeded to maintain its doctrinal position as a matter of faith even when it has been shown to be empirically unsound. My concern here is I think similar to that of Skene.
and Parker. The Roman Catholic Church’s contributions to public policy are based not only on their moral or ethical principles, but on an effectively arbitrary and dogmatic application of those principles that is backed by the full force of what is effectively a very powerful lobby group in many countries. Like Skene and Parker, I have no answer to the problem they have raised. Historically one thing is certain, in the future the Roman Catholic Church’s current position on the embryo will be judged to have been right or wrong with the wisdom of hindsight. Just as we judge the Church’s persecution of Galileo almost 400 years ago now.

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Non-compliance: a side effect of drug information leaflets

The problem of non-compliance with treat- ment and its repercussions on the clinical evolution of different conditions has been widely investigated.11 Non-compliance has also been shown to have significant economic implications, not only as a result of product loss but also indirectly through the complica- tion of disease management and its subse- quent healthcare and social costs.12

Non-compliance as a health problem

The term “non-compliance” might be taken to refer both to the failure to follow a drug regimen and to the failure to adopt other measures that contribute to improvement in health—for example, changes in lifestyle or diet. This letter focuses on the former. Non-compliance with a drug regimen can be the result of a number of different factors13 and a variety of techniques have been developed in an attempt to control it.14 Of these, the few techniques that have been shown to be effective have only managed to solve the problem in specific situations over short periods of time. The use of such techniques to control non-compliance, partic- ularly where these are effective, raises interesting ethical questions about the extent to which their application constitutes an infringement of the patient’s right to decide on how to manage their own health.1 Here we suggest that in some cases one factor that leads to non-compliance is the tendency to provide extensive and exhaustive information on side effects in patient information leaflets. Consider the following case.

A true story

One morning Dr Smith woke up with a slight cold—muscular aches, headache, chills, and nasal congestion. He decided to take some medicine to counteract its effects. His initial thought was to find something to combat his runny nose, so he chose a product specially indicated for this condition: “StopNose”. After reading the product information leaflet, however, Dr Smith felt another kind of chill run down his spine. He was struck cold by the contraindications, warnings, interactions, precautions, and adverse effects listed in the leaflet. If he used this drug, it said, he would run the risk of suffering nausea, anxiety, agitation, insomnia, hallucinations, convulsions, amazement, weariness, arrhyth- mia, dizziness. Rather than risk all of this, he thought, why not suffer a few bothersome sniffles? For his muscular aches, Dr Smith chose another drug, “Abatache”, but the risks described in the accompanying informa- tion leaflet seemed even worse. These included baldness, skin blistering, aspic meningitis, pneumonitis, fatal hepatitis, gastr- trointestinal perforation, blood in the urine, jaundice, kidney disease, peptic ulceration, mouth ulceration, visual abnormality .... So in the end, armed with his clinical and pharmacological knowledge, Dr Smith simply opted to continue blowing his nose and suffer a few muscular aches. He had no desire to play Russian roulette with his health.

The principle of autonomy and the right to information

The principle of autonomy in medical ethics places the patient at the centre of medical decision making about his or her care. It places particular emphasis on the importance of informed consent, and suggests that, except in rare situations,15 no patient should undergo medical treatment or surgical inter- vention without his or her fully informed authorisation. This is the basis of patient- centred medicine.

To obtain valid informed consent, it is argued that the patient must receive suffi- cient understandable information to make a fully informed choice. In practice this means that someone undergoing a specific treat- ment receives information from at least two sources. First, there is the given direct information from their doctor or another health professional about the drug to be taken, recommended lifestyle changes, and perhaps a warning of the hazards related to non-compliance. Secondly, they will also be provided with information on some of the side effects attributed to the drug being prescribed. Individual patients will tend to understand this information in a range of different ways. It is well recognised that they will respond with a variety of known behaviour patterns.16

Secondly, the patient will also receive additional information on side effects from the information provided with the drug itself. These leaflets tend to cite each and every one of the undesirable effects related—note “related”—to the principle active ingredient used in the drug. The information can in some cases be so complete or detailed that even any extremely unusual syndrome described in relation to the use of the drug will inevitably be listed in the leaflet as a possible adverse effect.17

This information can sometimes have a significant effect on the likelihood that a patient will take the drug in question and may lead to significant “non-compliance”. When patients with minor ailments read about all the problems that may occur from using the prescribed medication, they may start worrying, to say the least. Some people read the leaflet again and again. They may then consult another source of medical information such as a website and perhaps find that the dose for half the amount of time prescribed, or simply decide not to take the medicine at all.

In addition to the problem of non-compliance, the so-called nocebo effect18 needs to be considered whereby the patient’s mindset is often a key element in the appearance of either physical or imaginary side effects, as has been shown in various studies.19 Such an effect may be caused by information leaflets.

Complete information versus sufficient information

Practically any city dweller would refuse to use transport services, work tools, or recrea- tional facilities if they were supplied with complete, absolute, and extensive informa- tion on the hazards these might entail. Precautions and warnings are usually good things, but they should be kept within reasonable limits to avoid creating outright panic. Too much information can sometimes undermine autonomy and also lead to sig- nificant harms through non-compliance.

It was shown some years ago that information supplied by doctors can generate side effects that cannot subsequently be corroborated by physical examination. As it happens all too often, the information was not as exhaustive or complete as it might be. In view of this, we believe that the kind of information given in drug descriptions should be reassessed. The information should be true, accurate, and easy to understand in as complete a way as possible, but it should not generate alarm that can lead to dele- tious consequences in the healthcare sector or in the economic sphere.

So what did the patient decide?

The patient, shocked and dismayed at the drug’s side effects, finally decides not to follow the doctor’s recommendation. He (or she) will try to relax, perhaps by smoking a cigarette laced with nicotine, tar, and a number of other substances. True enough, doctors recommend giving up smoking. But who will listen to what a doctor says about smoking when he or she appears to be prescribing drugs truly hazardous to health? After all, a pack of cigarettes only says that cigarette smoking seriously damages your health. There is certainly no leaflet listing each and every one of its possible side effects. Tobacco kills, but it sometimes looks as if medication is worse.

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www.jmedethics.com
We read with interest the papers on informed consent published in a recent issue of the Journal of Medical Ethics.1,2 Almost all the PRHOs who took part in our survey had good legal understanding of the differences between competent and incompetent patients.3 This may be interpreted as a positive result of the change in the curriculum at their particular medical school, which includes extensive sessions about informed consent. These embrace ethics, law, and communication skills. However, despite their understanding, the junior doctors in our study still experienced problems about their role in the consent process. The problems pertained to pressure of time and lack of support by senior doctors, as well as pressure on them at times to obtain consent in circumstances where they had been taught that they should not. This gap between the standards of informed consent currently taught to medical students and the clinical realities they face, and into which they are thrust, is an ongoing problem.4

If informed consent is to fulfil the purpose of respecting the autonomy and dignity of patients, sufficient resources are required to train young doctors to do the job properly, especially as regards their understanding of procedures for which they are providing information and their competence as communicators. One thing is clear: if they cannot complete the task in accordance with the guidance issued, they imply that it is defective.5,6 Gebhardt and the journalist think errors are substantial danger of misinterpretation of the current situation, which in turn may frustrate the process of increased transpar- ence. We would therefore like to respond to this by giving background information and reasons for some of the choices that were made with respect to the registry of complications mentioned by Gebhardt.

First, a distinction needs to be made between an error and an adverse outcome, which are often confused. From Gebhardt’s reference to the journalist’s article which discusses the same registry of adverse outcomes, but with the title referring to errors, both Gebhardt and the journalist think errors and adverse outcomes are the same thing. However, an error refers to the process in which something has gone wrong, a sub- standard performance, regardless of the outcome. It has been explained by others that such a judgement may have a degree of subjectivity.2 An adverse outcome refers to the outcome which is unwanted but does not necessarily imply that an error has been made. This is why the term “adverse outcomes” is used rather than the term “complications”, since the latter term is often confused with an error being made. The registration of medical complications that Gebhardt refers to is a registry of adverse outcomes guided by an unambiguous definition of the term “adverse outcome”, of which only a small percentage is related to errors.7,8 Furthermore, some errors will be missed in this registration—that is, errors which have not led to adverse outcomes.

Secondly, with respect to confidentiality, this is relevant in particular for the initial years of such a registry during which it is thoroughly tested and accuracy of the registra- tion may vary widely between participants. Nothing is gained by false positive signals with respect to the high incidence of adverse outcomes in some hospitals, except perhaps by flashing headlines in newspapers. In this respect one may compare the development of such a national registry to the development of a new drug, in which case no one argues about the adverse outcomes become available to the public with respect to probability of an adverse outcome given certain types of surgery.

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Box 1: Patients need information to make a well-informed choice

Who is a good doctor and what is a good hospital? This simple question is not easy to answer. For some patients, a good doctor or hospital is one that avoids making errors. For others, it is one that treats them as individuals. Importantly, none of these patients would be satisfied if both doctors or hospitals had 0% mortality. The question is: what is the best place to go to for this type of problem? That this question is so complex is partly due to the way in which patients, and arguably also healthcare professionals, have never been exposed to the underlying assumptions of the principle of respect for autonomy. Research has shown that healthcare professionals, like doctors and nurses, do not trust these data. Because, among other reasons, they do not trust these data, they have not taken them into account.

The NPCF (Dutch Federation of Patients and Consumer Organisations) and its member organisations have published several consumer guides for specific diseases to help patients find their way in the labyrinth of the healthcare system. Patients experience many difficulties in getting access to relevant information from doctors' organisations and insurance companies. Therefore the NPCF wants to cooperate with these organisations to create consumer information based on the important and relevant data that are available. A joint project for a databank on best practices started in September 2003. Patients are not interested in black lists of doctors and malpractices. They prefer to know about good and best practices to make a well-informed choice for a doctor or hospital. They need consumer information on objective measures such as the risk of infection in a hospital, the specific skills of a doctor, how many patients with this specific disease are treated a year, etc. Patients would also like to receive subjective information on a specific hospital or doctor: How is the communication between a doctor and his or her patients? Does the team give enough information and support when needed?, etc. This experience based information is often available from patient organisations.

The NPCF has chosen to work together with organisations of healthcare providers and insurance companies to use parts of their databanks as a basis for consumer information. One task of the NPCF is to translate the data into the information that meets the needs of the patients, based on research and experiences of patients. Joint efforts are needed to make this important information accessible for doctors and patients.

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Finally, what does the patient want? (see box 1). International research has shown that patients do not use public information on performance of hospitals or doctors for making a choice of treatment or hospital because, among other reasons, they do not understand and do not trust these data. This also applies to adverse outcomes data. For interpreting the incidence of hospital specific adverse outcomes it is important to know the context—for example, since older, sicker, and more complex patients have higher probabilities of adverse outcomes. It is therefore vital to establish a reliable registry which can be trusted and understood both by medical professionals and the public. For this reason, the Association of Surgeons of the Netherlands and the Dutch Federation of Patients and Consumer Organisations (NPCF) are collaborating with respect to the national surgical adverse outcome registry, in particular, to produce information that is relevant for patients about treatment and hospital choices. Supported by the international literature, the NPCF holds the view that patients are not primarily interested in data on adverse outcomes, since they are aware that these data need to be interpreted in the right context. Patients are more interested in the experience of other patients or doctors who have treated such patients. For example, a patient who is considering whether to have a hip replacement operation will be more interested in the experience of other patients or doctors who have treated such patients, or they know from their family or friends that the hip replacement operation is a standard operation and can be performed by many surgeons and hospitals. Patients therefore want to cooperate with these organisations to create consumer information based on the important and relevant data that are available. A joint project for a database on best practices started in September 2003. Patients are not interested in black lists of doctors and malpractices. They prefer to know about good and best practices to make a well-informed choice for a doctor or hospital. They need consumer information on objective measures such as the risk of infection in a hospital, the specific skills of a doctor, how many patients with this specific disease are treated a year, etc. Patients would also like to receive subjective information on a specific hospital or doctor: How is the communication between a doctor and his or her patients? Does the team give enough information and support when needed?, etc. This experience based information is often available from patient organisations.

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What do patients value in their hospital care? A response to Joffe et al

In the Journal of Medical Ethics, Joffe et al recently published an article titled “What do patients value in their hospital care? An empirical perspective on autonomy centred bioethics”. This empirical study evaluates whether patients’ willingness to recommend their hospital to others is more strongly associated with their belief that they had an adequate say in their treatment. Their belief that they had an adequate say in their treatment is associated with their belief that they were treated with respect and dignity than with their belief that they had an adequate say in their treatment.” Joffe et al are encouraged to go on to suggest that confirmation of these empirical hypotheses would constitute a prescription for elevating the principle of respect for persons to the level that the principle of respect for autonomy currently enjoys in our model of the ideal patient–physician relationship (p 104). In other words, they suggest that by considering judgements and judgements gener-ally important is important. When constructing a moral theory for a particular community—let us take the patients’ community—we want to use only those judgements that reflect the respondents’ real moral sensibilities, and not those stemming from superficial prejudices or their mood on the day they happen to respond to the survey. Important questions, however, for researchers, who, like Joffe et al, are using the concept of reflective equilibrium: (1) precisely how did the patients consider judgements have to be if they are to count; and, more practically, (2) how can a researcher know whether he or she is collecting them—that is, what survey method, if any, is appropriate for the task?
Although it is difficult to give a positive answer to these questions (and I will not attempt to do so here), some survey methods, such as the mailed questionnaires that Joffe et al. used, seem particularly inadequate. Rawls suggests that certain external conditions favour the formation of considered judgements: “the person making the [considered] judgment is presumed to have the ability, the opportunity and the desire to reach a correct decision (or at least, not the desire not to)” (p 48). Very likely, however, many of Joffe et al.’s respondents lacked the necessary ability, opportunity, or desire to respond to their moral judgements when responding to the questionnaire they received in the mail. Furthermore, even if a number of patients did offer legitimate considered judgements, there is no way to distinguish these from those made by respondents who lacked the requisite ability or desire. Although the size of Joffe et al.’s study is of value for its ability more accurately to reflect a population’s response to its survey questions, because of the practical limitations that come with its size, the study falls short of capturing patients’ considered moral judgements.

Any empirical approach using reflective equilibrium, as Joffe et al. does, faces a second challenge: why do we want people’s considered moral judgements to influence our theories of ethics in the first place? In his influential critique of reflective equilibrium, D W Haslett writes:

... given the wide differences between people’s considered moral judgments, and given that these differences are, as we know, largely just a reflection of differences in upbringing, culture, religion, and so on, it would appear that, far from having a reason for giving people’s considered moral judgments initial credibility, we have instead a reason for initial skepticism (p 309).

If moral judgements are liable to reflect superficial prejudices, one could argue, considered moral judgements are liable to reflect deep seated ones. Surely this prejudice is something ethicists would like to overcome, deep seated ones. Surely this prejudice is something ethicists would like to overcome.

However, if empirical findings are to defeat a particular normative principle, the assumption that those findings challenge must be logically necessary for our holding that principle. For instance, without showing that patients’ desire for autonomy is necessary for our holding the mandatory autonomy view, the studies that Joffe et al. cite, even if valid, can be interpreted variously as devaluing the mandatory autonomy view or as recommending that we better educate the public about the value of autonomy. This normative question cannot be settled empirically.

Empirical researchers have the potential to contribute substantially to bioethics, but their work needs the kind of philosophical and empirical rigor that comes from truly interdisciplinary collaboration and must be informed by a careful reflection on the proper relationship between descriptive and normative bioethics. Joffe et al. take us part of the way down that path. An exciting research itinerary lies ahead.
How to be a ‘good’ medical student

The public revelation in 2003 that medical students perform intimate examinations without patient consent has engendered much debate in the press and scientific journals. Using this case as a springboard for discussion, I will argue that medical schools should encourage students to raise their ethical concerns and call for a change of policy making it easier for students to do so. I will also address the question of medical students’ moral obligations towards their patients, and conclude that medical students ought to express their discontent when faced with unethical practices or attitudes.

In early January 2003, a study appeared in the British Medical Journal revealing that nearly a quarter of rectal and vaginal examinations on anaesthetised patients were performed by medical students without patient consent. Although the study did not generate the firestorm of controversy many expected, it engendered much discussion on ethical issues surrounding informed consent and patient autonomy, as well as stressing the need for greater ethics training for medical students. As an ethical problem, however, the case of intimate examinations is, to my mind, relatively uninteresting. If we consider that medical students’ actions raise ethical concerns and patient autonomy, as well as stressing the need for greater ethics training for medical students. As an ethical problem, however, the case of intimate examinations is, to my mind, relatively uninteresting. If we consider that medical students’ actions raise ethical concerns and patient autonomy, as well as stressing the need for greater ethics training for medical students.

Jutting from some of the comments from students at Bristol, however, the growing emergence of medical ethics has not dispelled the awkward climate of unquestioned reverence towards the medical establishment and individual teachers. Students should not have to perform heroic acts of courage to raise ethical concerns. In light of medical ethics’ place in the curriculum, the situation is deeply paradoxical. Students may be taught the importance of respecting the patient’s autonomy one day, but witness an obvious violation of this principle by their teachers the next. For the subject to be of any value, students must not only be allowed, but positively encouraged to put into practice their knowledge without the fear of appearing “inadequate and stupid”. If a student’s ethical concerns remain unresolved after discussion with the teacher, there should be formal mechanisms of complaint, perhaps through a committee specifically set up for that purpose, or through the school’s medical ethicist, who would then investigate the matter thoroughly. Medical ethics is, after all, an applied discipline.

It is nonetheless all too easy to blame the medical establishment and individual teachers for the unethical behaviour of students, as if the appellation “medical student” shielded individuals from putting into moral fault. In Nick Hornby’s novel “How to be good”, the narrator, an adulterous GP and mother of two, resolves her moral conundrums by adopting a two, resolves her moral conundrums by adopting a good doctor”. It is only later that she acknowledges that her justification is too facile: “It’s not enough to just be a doctor, you have to be a good doctor”. Students, however wide eyed or intimidated by the scale of independent thought. Their personal values should not vanish as they put on the white coat, just as a patient’s rights should not evaporate when under anaesthetic. Although the reluctance of many Bristol students to perform the examinations is comforting, it seems that none acted on their qualms by declining to perform the procedure or asking that proper consent be obtained. Neither the diminished responsibility of the medical student, nor his status as an apprentice, removes the need for ethical reflection in daily proceedings. Indeed, far from absolving him from moral inquiry, these factors should encourage a process of ethical questioning. This exercise is, to my mind, crucial to a student’s flourishing as a morally responsible future doctor. To paraphrase Nick Hornby: “it’s not enough to just be a medical student”.

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Successful applicants will be informed by 31st March 2005.

Correction
doi: 10.1136/jme.2002.001378corr1

An error has been pointed out in the affiliation for R Andorno, author of The right not to know: an autonomy approach (J Med Ethics 2004;30:435–439). The correct affiliation is Interdepartmental Center for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW), University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany. The journal apologises for this error.
Non-compliance: a side effect of drug information leaflets

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