

Attempts by both the economists and some of the non-economists to widen the concept of utilitarianism may prove to be more productive. In particular Mooney and McGuire's discussion of 'process utility' – derived from how health care is delivered, as opposed to the utility from outcome – provides another dimension to the conventional view of social welfare which has obvious implications for medical ethics.

Several messages emerge from this set of readings and from the helpful introduction and epilogue. First, economists probably do somewhat misperceive medical ethics by seeing it as a 'set of rules' rather than as a process which reflects the norms and values of medicine. Second, the distinction between macro and micro resource allocation decisions – and their counterparts of social versus medical ethics – needs to be clarified. Clinical freedom may be sacrosanct at the micro level, but it can only operate within an environment determined from 'above'. The role (if any) of doctors at the macro (planning) level of resource allocation is different from their role at the micro (patient care) level and the broader concept of 'health care ethics', discussed by several of the contributors should have been developed more fully.

But the most important message from this book is simply that the conflict can no longer be ignored. Medical decisions are still largely based on maximising individual patients' welfare and ignoring opportunity cost. With an ever-widening gap between available

health care resources and the demands made on them, such a situation cannot continue. As the first constructive bringing together of the two sides in the conflict to stimulate this much needed debate, Mooney and McGuire's book is a landmark which should open the eyes of doctors and economists alike.

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The 'Discovery' of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Abraham B Bergman, 237 pages, Seattle, \$12.50, University of Washington Press, 1988.

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the term used to describe those unexpected deaths of apparently healthy infants for which no adequate cause can be found at post-mortem examination. Twenty years ago there was little public awareness of what was then and is now the commonest mode of infant death after the neonatal period. The parents were sometimes wrongly accused of neglect or even murder, and received no information or help from health professionals and little or no support in their bereavement from local agencies.

This book tells the story of the campaign mounted in the United States

by the parents to involve government in changing attitudes, seeking and disseminating information, funding research, and ensuring support for bereaved families. The parents had the backing of a handful of doctors, mostly paediatricians, amongst whom the author, Dr Abraham Bergman, has been the most vocal. His book charts the progress of the small team in lobbying government health officials, congressmen and senators, in seeing the final passage of the SIDS legislation bill through the senate, and in the setting up of the National SIDS Foundation. The gradual improvement in recognition by the public and by bureaucrats of the issues involved is described and the book has an epilogue showing the steadily increasing professional commitment to research on the subject.

Dr Bergman never hesitates to name names, applauding those who supported his efforts and castigating those who did not. It is a story about the political scene peculiar to America, and the diverse and less abrasive efforts of those in other countries to achieve similar ends are not described. Medical politicians in this country who seek to change attitudes and move mountains may nevertheless get some useful tips on how to penetrate the apparently solid defence of those holding governmental power in the realm of public health.

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