

The Journal of the Institute of Medical Ethics

The *Journal of Medical Ethics* was established in 1975, with a multidisciplinary editorial board, to promote the study of contemporary medico-moral problems. The editorial board has as its aims the encouragement of a high academic standard for this ever-developing subject and the enhancement of professional and public discussion. The journal is published quarterly and includes papers on all aspects of health care ethics, analyses ethical concepts and theories and features case conferences and comment on clinical practice. Intermittent series focus on the **Teaching of medical ethics**; on the medico-moral problems directly experienced by health care workers (**At the coalface**); on the pursuit of arguments prompted by papers in the journal (**Debate**); on medical ethics in literature (**Medical ethics and literature**); and on briefly argued often unorthodox opinions related to medical ethics (**Point of view**). The journal also contains book reviews and letters.

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Papers submitted for publication should be sent in **quadruplicate** to: The Editor, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, c/o Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, 14 Prince's Gardens, London SW7 1NA. Rejected manuscripts are not returned. Papers should be in double-spaced typewriting on one side of the paper only. **The preferred maximum length of papers is 3,500 words – absolute maximum 5,500 (including references).** A total word count (including references) is requested. On a separate sheet some brief biographical details should be supplied, including the title of the author's present post, degrees and/or professional qualifications, (if any) and any other relevant information.

Two copies of the journal will be sent to authors free of charge after their papers are published. Offprints of individual papers may be bought from *Journal of Medical Ethics*, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR.

In March 1981 the *JME* adopted a simplified 'Vancouver style' for references: details are given in various issues, including December 1990. They are also available from the editorial office. The full text of the 'Vancouver Agreement' was published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1988; volume 296; 401–405. As the 'Vancouver style' is incompatible with the long established style of references for legal articles, lawyers should use their own standard style, but try to facilitate reference by others. The journal is multidisciplinary and **papers should be in clear jargon-free English, accessible to any intelligent reader.**

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News and notes

Inaugural Congress of the International Association of Bioethics

The Inaugural Congress of the International Association of Bioethics will be held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands from the 5th - 7th of October this year.

The association was founded by Peter Singer, Helga Kuhse and Daniel Wikler. At present it operates under an interim structure and will continue to do so until the inaugural congress. A constitution will be presented for approval at this meeting and a committee and an executive will be elected to govern the association.

The association will have as objectives:

1. To link all those working in bioethics, facilitating contacts and the exchange of information;
2. To organise international conferences on bioethics, to be held at intervals to be decided by the membership;
3. To encourage the development of research and teaching in bioethics;
4. To uphold the value of free, open and reasoned discussion of issues in bioethics.

The scientific programme of the congress will cover many of the most widely discussed issues in the field, for example medical decisions at the beginning and end of life, justice in health care, genetics and the 'Human Genome Project'.

For further information please contact: Bioethics Inaugural Congress, Congress Secretariat, c/o Health Council, PO Box 90517, 2509 LM The Hague, the Netherlands.

Study commissioned to improve scrutiny of experiments on humans

A team from Swansea University has been commissioned by the Department of Health to investigate the training needs of local research ethics committees - groups which oversee the conduct of experiments involving human subjects.

The department issued guidelines for the NHS last August which emphasised the need for independent advice on the ethical acceptability of research proposals and recommended the basis on which local research ethics committees should be established.

The majority of English health districts have confirmed that committees have been set up in accordance with these guidelines. The Department of Health now wishes to ensure that committee members have access to training and information to support them in their important role.

The Swansea team has been asked to research the question and produce a training package to meet the identified requirements.

Dr Donald Evans, Director of the Centre for The Study of Philosophy and Health Care at Swansea, who is leading the new £37,000 study, said local committee members were offered 'little or no training' to help them carry out the vital task of protecting the welfare of human subjects.

He emphasised that all committee members needed to be sure of their role so that experiments could proceed with proper scrutiny of the ethics involved.

At present there are about 250 Local Research Ethics Committees in the UK: their approval is required for any medical or pharmaceutical trials which take place in their health authority areas.

An average of 12 people sit on each local body, comprising medical and health-care professionals and lay people.

So far as is known only a few training conferences have been held in the UK - two of these were at Swansea - and the provision of training courses is thought to be extremely limited. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the composition of the committees changes every three to five years.

The second part of the Swansea study will focus on the problems facing researchers who wish to conduct trials in a number of locations, and the role of each research ethics committee in protecting research subjects in its area.

In some cases trials have been approved by the review committee of a central body, but certain local committees have withheld approval because they were not satisfied that the interests of their local research subjects were fully protected.

Such conflicts over multi-centre trials, said Dr Evans, cause 'consternation' among everyone involved and highlight the need for better communication between central and local watchdogs. The Swansea study will seek to find the best mechanism for handling the review of such trials with minimum delay.

The research team will collaborate closely with colleagues in the USA and Denmark where similar problems exist over training and communication.

Swansea expect to complete their study by June 1992 when a further statement will be made.

For further information please contact: Dr Donald Evans, Director, Centre for The Study of Philosophy and Health Care, University College Swansea. Telephone: Swansea (0792) 295611, or Amanda Harvie, John Kendall Associates. Telephone: Cardiff (0222) 222496.

Working Party on Genetic Screening

The Chairman of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Sir Patrick Nairne, has announced the terms of reference and membership of the Working Party on Genetic Screening. The establishment of the Working Party, under the Chairmanship of Professor Dame June Lloyd, was announced in January.

The Working Party extends an invitation to interested parties to send their observations on the issues that fall within its terms of reference.

The terms of reference of the Working Party are as follows:

- (1) to survey and report on recent and prospective advances in genetic screening and its applications;
- (2) to review experience to date of current and potential benefits and difficulties of genetic screening and associated counselling;
- (3) to identify, define and discuss the ethical issues affecting both individuals and society which arise, or may arise in future from genetic screening, including such matters as:
 - (a) the general risk of stigma attaching or being attached to those perceived as genetically disadvantaged;
 - (b) the handling and holding of information;
 - (c) consent to being screened;
 - (d) confidentiality in all its aspects;
 - (e) the implications for employment and insurance;
 - (f) the storage and use of genetic information for legal purposes;
- (4) to report to the Nuffield Council on Bioethics within eighteen months.

Interested parties and individuals are invited to send their observations to the Working Party at the address below, preferably by **10 June 1992**. The Working Party recognises that many bodies and individuals may have already produced material relevant to the terms of reference which they would wish to draw to the attention of the Working Party. The Secretary to the Working Party, Mr David Shapiro, is available to advise on the most useful form that observations could take. **It would be appreciated if he could be**

notified in advance of observations that might not be ready by 10 June 1992.

Enquiries to: Mr David Shapiro, Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3EG. Telephone: 071-631 0566; fax: 071-323 4877.

Autonomy in Health Care Decisions

A one day multi-disciplinary conference to examine autonomy in health care decisions will be held at the University of Surrey on Wednesday, 16th September 1992. This conference is jointly organised by Mrs S M Goodinson-McLaren, Director of Undergraduate Nursing Studies at the University of Surrey, and Dr J Singleton, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the Hatfield Polytechnic.

The speakers will include lawyers, philosophers, nurses and psychiatrists. The conference will be of interest to all those in the health care professions and other fields such as law, philosophy and the social sciences.

The fee for the conference will be £75, to include lunch and refreshments.

For further information please contact: Mrs D Riddey, Department of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 5XH. Telephone: 0483 300800 ext 2545.

Medical Action for Global Security

In April a new organisation for health professionals, MEDACT – Medical Action for Global Security – was launched.

It was formed by merging two existing medically-based organisations that have worked closely together: the Medical Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons and the Medical Association for Prevention of War.

MEDACT will extend their campaign against weapons of mass destruction to working for peace and global security.

For more information contact: MEDACT, 601 Holloway Road,

London N19 4DJ. Telephone: 071 272 2020.

Bioethics in a Changing World: International Symposium and Certificate Program

The symposium, which is to be held in Cambridge, England from August 9–14 this year, 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.

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 postgraduate 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.

The symposium is presented by Girton College, Cambridge University and the International Bioethics Institute.

For more information contact: William A Atchley, MD, International Bioethics Institute, 1721 Mar West, Tiburon, California 94920-1932. Telephone: (415) 435-4900, Fax: (415) 435-2635.

Ceres: correction

In our short news and note item on “Ceres” in the September 1991 issue of the journal, we omitted to provide a contact address. The omission is remedied here.

Ceres (Consumers for ethics in research) is contactable via Ceres UK, PO Box 1365, London N16 0BW.

Medical groups

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Medical groups associated with the Institute of Medical Ethics have been established in British university teaching hospitals. Each academic year they arrange programmes of lectures and symposia on issues raised by the practice of medicine which concern other disciplines. Although these programmes are addressed primarily to medical, nursing and other hospital students they are open to all members of the medical, nursing and allied professions. There is no fee for attendance. Lecture lists are available by direct application to the appropriate co-ordinating secretary named above. A stamped addressed A4 envelope would be appreciated.

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The Institute of Medical Ethics is an organisation for research, education and information in the broad area of health care ethics. It is financed by grants from charitable bodies, government sources and members' subscriptions.

It was established as the Society for the Study of Medical Ethics, and is an independent, non-partisan organisation for the dispassionate multidisciplinary study of medico-moral issues raised by the practice of medicine.

The institute aims to help improve the quality of both professional and public discussion of medico-moral questions; to promote the study of medical ethics; to promote high academic standards for this developing subject; to encourage a multidisciplinary approach to discussion of the consequences of clinical practice; to stimulate research into specific problems, and to remain non-partisan and independent of all interest groups and lobbies.

Institute reports include: *The Ethics of Resource Allocation in Health Care* by Kenneth Boyd, on ethical issues arising from scarcity of health care resources; *Dilemmas of Dying* by Ian Thompson, on ethical issues arising in the care of the dying, both published by the Edinburgh University Press; *Medical Research with Children: Ethics, Law and Practice* by Richard Nicholson, an analysis of the ethics of clinical research investigations on children, published by the Oxford University Press; *Life Before Birth – the Search for a Consensus on Abortion and the Treatment of Infertility* by Kenneth Boyd, Brendan Callaghan and Edward Shotter, published by SPCK, and *The Pond Report on the Teaching of Medical Ethics*, which was published directly for the institute.

Among shorter recent institute reports are: Assisted Death, *Lancet*, 1990 and HIV infection: the ethics of anonymised testing and of testing pregnant women, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 1990, both written by the institute's Research Director, Kenneth Boyd, on behalf of institute working parties.

The institute derives from the London Medical Group, a student group for the study of ethical issues raised by the practice of medicine which, beginning in 1963, arranged a comprehensive programme of lectures and symposia on such issues. Similar groups associated with the institute are now established in university teaching hospitals at Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford, Sheffield and Southampton.

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