

PostScript

BOOK REVIEW



The Health Care Professional as Friend and Healer: Building on the work of Edmund Pellegrino

Edited by D Thomasma and J Kissell. Georgetown University Press, 2000, £46.75, pp 300. 0-87840-810-X

This book is dedicated to Dr Pellegrino and the editors invited those to whom he was leader and friend to contribute chapters on topics that have marked his career over the years. It is in four parts: the nature of the health care professional; the moral basis of health care; current challenges, and medical education. The tone is set by an initial seminal chapter from Leo O'Donovan SJ entitled *A Profession of Trust: Reflections on a Fundamental Virtue*. As the subtitle indicates, it builds on Pellegrino's work to do with the idea of the internal morality of medicine. Both Pellegrino and MacIntyre have developed this concept, originating in the work of both Aristotle and Plato. In the first chapter of part II Veatch analyses the concepts of internal versus external sources of morality for medicine. He argues that a purely internal morality is impossible since the ends of the practice of medicine cannot be derived without considering the external ends of human living itself.

Despite the fact that 20 of its 24 contributors are not from Georgetown University, this book emphatically and unashamedly carries the Georgetown *imprimatur*. It originated in the somewhat controversial thesis of John F Monagle that the special characteristic of the relationship between "healer" and patient lies in the idea of friendship. This is well weighed and criticised in a chapter by Davis entitled *Friendship as an Ideal for the Patient-Physician Relationship: a Critique and an Alternative*. He points to the problems inherent in the friendship model, which are mainly centred on the power imbalance.

Among the contributors, one is a nurse, another is a dentist, and six are physicians. Clearly not all of these are still working at the clinical "coalface" and, if this is so, neither of the editors and none but a few of the contributors are working in what a philosopher colleague of mine has called "the dirty end of the business". On the one hand this means that, for me as a card carrying clinician very definitely at that end, the book is far too metaphysical and, therefore, unbalanced. My main objections are, first, that nowhere is the necessary concept of the health care professional (HCP) as a risk assessor and manager considered. Second, the concept of the physician (and by extension, other HCPs) as healers is taken as

a given. Regrettably the concept of healing is nowhere defined or analysed satisfactorily.

It must be emphasised, however, on the other hand, that those trained as physicians who have moved to "higher things" and those whose expertise is in other disciplines, have a great deal to teach us "jobbing physicians". This book, therefore, contains a great deal to which we should pay particular attention now. The deprofessionalisation of medicine (that has been a clear, politically driven process under successive governments in the UK) is well considered by Donovan in his chapter on *The Physician-Patient Relationship*. I agree totally that these trends "do not bode well for society" (page 15). I kept on returning to the aforementioned chapter by the Jesuit, O'Donovan, *A Profession of Trust: Reflections on a Fundamental Virtue*. He reminds us that, while trust is at the heart of being a good doctor, we practise "in a society in which the corrosive signs of mistrust are ever present and ever powerful" (page 3).

Although I have reservations about this book I found many sections of it very meaningful. "The health care professional as friend and healer" is, however, only part of the picture.

G M Stirrat

NOTICES

The Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group (AISSG)

The Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group (AISSG) <http://www.medhelp.org/www/ais> is a consortium of worldwide support groups, originating in the UK, providing information and support to adults and families affected by some conditions affecting the development of the reproductive system. These are conditions that have been subject to considerable secrecy and paternalism in the past, and AISSG promotes full disclosure of diagnostic information with accompanying psychological support. It also encourages recent moves to evaluate the efficacy of genital reconstruction surgery and supports the notion of autonomy and informed consent.

The conditions supported included AIS— androgen insensitivity syndrome (old name testicular feminization syndrome or testicular feminisation syndrome)—and similar conditions, for example, XY gonadal dysgenesis (Swyer's syndrome), 5-alpha reductase deficiency, leydig cell hypoplasia, Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser (MRKH) syndrome, Mullerian dysgenesis/aplasia, and vaginal atresia.

Death Without Suffering

An advanced European Bioethics Course, *Death Without Suffering*, will be held from 31 March to 2 April 2003 in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Specialists from various countries will discuss ethical issues to do with medically assisted death and palliative care.

Subjects will include: Death, suffering, and the concept of palliative care; Death and suffering; Ethical perspectives; Ethical issues in pain management in hospice care, and Scientific research in palliative care.

The lecturers will be: D Gracia (Spain), W Dekkers, B Gordijn, H ten Have, D Willems,

and Z Zylicz (all from the Netherlands). The language of the course will be English and the price is €295.

Further information: N Steinkamp, University Medical Centre Nijmegen, Dept 232 Ethics, Philosophy and History of Medicine, PO Box 9101, 6500 HB Nijmegen, the Netherlands (tel: +31 24 3615320; fax: +31 24 3540254; email: n.steinkamp@efg.kun.nl).

Spring conference: Bioethics in a Small World

From April 10 to 12 2003 the Europäische Akademie will organise an international conference on bioethical problems connected to the globalisation process. The conference will include sessions on methodological problems—"Bioethics. A science and its application in politics"; "Culture-dependent ethics?"—as well as practical problems such as "Research Ethics", "Access to essential drugs", "Patents on biomaterials", and "GMOs and the world's nutrition problem". Speakers will include Abdallah Daar (Toronto), Weyma Lübke (Leipzig), Edgar Morscher (Salzburg), Udo Schüklenk (Johannesburg), Carmel Shalev (Tel Hashomer), Joseph Strauss (Munich).

For further information contact the scientific organisers: Richard Ashcroft (r.ashcroft@ic.ac.uk) or Felix Thiele (Felix.Thiele@DLR.de).

9th Conference of the ABA: "Virtue and Vice in Bioethics"

You are invited to the 9th Conference of the ABA: "Virtue and Vice in Bioethics" on the 3–6 July 2003. The venue is Queenstown, New Zealand. Confirmed invited speakers: Art Frank, Carl Elliot, and Annette Baier.

Further information: Pat Johnston, Dunedin Conference Management Services, New Zealand (tel: +64 3 477 1377; fax: +64 3 477 2720; email: pat@dcms.co.nz).

European Integration—Philosophy and Ethics of Health Care

The XVIIth international congress of the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Healthcare will be held from August 21–23 2003 in Vilnius, Lithuania. Its theme is European Integration—Philosophy and Ethics of Health Care.

Abstracts are invited addressing the following topics: development of medical philosophy and bioethics; institutionalisation of philosophy and ethics in health care; harmonisation of medical research regulations; human rights and health care; solidarity and health care; just health care; the gap between "academic" and "bureaucratic" bioethics; commercialisation in health care; patenting and genetics; genetic health related databases; research and personal data; use of biological materials, and (future) European guidelines in biomedical research. Abstracts (500 words maximum) should reach organisers on disk or by email before December 1 2002.

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