

# Journal of medical ethics

## The Journal of the Society for the Study of Medical Ethics

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## Correspondence

### The right to strike by the caring professions

SIR,

As Professor Dworkin has forcefully argued, the fundamental ethical case against industrial action by the caring professions is that their overriding duty is to their patients. In practice it is impossible to withdraw services without harming those in need of such care. Neither a distinction between harm and inconvenience, nor a distinction between emergencies and non-emergencies, nor a concentration of attack on the administration rather than on those in need, can in fact be sustained. A theoretical principle of distinction which might allow the overriding duty still to be acknowledged fails in practice.

Without entering into the area of judging particular cases, I should

like to raise two questions about the basic principle.

First, how overriding is 'overriding'? In normal circumstances we should answer 'absolutely overriding'. In exceptional circumstances we should probably admit that there might be claims and interests which overrode even a patient's 'overriding' claim. What if there is a confused and confusing middle ground, where the just claims based on an individual's need could be satisfied only at the cost of very great sacrifice on the part of the person who could meet those needs? If we are thinking in terms of moral obligations, then we must set alongside the obligations of the caring professions the obligation of society to protect their needs. If we are moving beyond the claims of justice to the area of non-reciprocal sacrifice, then we should bear in

mind the old tag that 'caritas non obligat cum gravi incommodo' ('love does not oblige in cases of severe self damage').

Second, what has the fundamental principle to say about who the patients are towards whom there is an overriding duty? Are they present patients, or future patients, or both? And if both are included, might it be possible to argue that the welfare of future patients justified a measure of inconvenience, and even harm, to present patients? (Even if this is the case, it does not of course follow that industrial action is the right and only way of securing the long-term interests of patients. But, ethically, the argument needs to be assessed.)

PETER BAELZ

*Christ Church, Oxford*

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*Donald Coggan*

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Copies can be obtained from the Publisher, *Journal of medical ethics*, Tavistock House East, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR

#### Cancer and truth

*Ecaterina Hanganu and G Popa*

Strikes and the National Health Service: Some legal and ethical issues

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#### Commentary

Should doctors strike? A personal view  
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The literature of medical ethics:  
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Death my only love

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## Lectures and symposia

### **Tuesday 4 October**

LMG lecture: MARITAL BREAKDOWN IN THE LIGHT OF CHANGING SEXUAL ATTITUDES 6 pm Charing Cross Hospital Medical School

Dr Jack Dominian, consultant psychiatrist, Central Middlesex Hospital

### **Thursday 6 October**

LMG symposium: ABORTION: WILL WE EVER GET THE LAW WE NEED? 5.45 pm Guy's Hospital Medical School

Professor Timothy J H Clark, consultant physician and Professor of Thoracic Medicine, Guy's Hospital; Professor Peter Huntingford, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, The London Hospital; Dr R F R Gardner, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Sunderland Group of Hospitals; Professor Gerald Dworkin, Faculty of Law, University of Southampton

### **Tuesday 11 October**

LMG symposium: MUTILATING SURGERY: THE PATIENT'S RIGHT TO 'NO' 5.45 pm King's College Hospital Medical School

Mr James Boak, consultant surgeon and senior lecturer in surgery, Royal Postgraduate Medical School; Dr Colin Murray Parkes, senior lecturer in psychiatry, The London Hospital Medical College. It is hoped to present a patient.

### **Thursday 13 October**

BMG symposium: ABORTION: A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE 7.30 pm Lecture Theatre, Bristol Royal Infirmary

Professor Peter Huntingford, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Mile End Hospital; Dr Berry Bowmont, senior registrar in community medicine, London

### **Thursday 13 October**

LMG symposium: SPINA BIFIDA: YESTERDAY'S SURGICAL TRIUMPH, TODAY'S SOCIAL DILEMMA 5.45 pm The London Hospital Medical College

Mr James Dickson, Senior Lecturer in Paediatric Surgery, Institute of Child Health; Mr Steven Dorner, Principal Clinical Psychologist, Wessex Unit for Children and Parents, St James' Hospital, Portsmouth; Mrs Moyna Gilbertson, Chief Executive Officer, Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus

### **Monday 17 October**

MMG lecture: DEVIANCE A DISEASE? THE ETHICS OF BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION 5.30 pm The Medical School, Manchester

(Chairman) Dr A A Campbell, consultant forensic psychiatrist, Prestwich Hospital. Speaker to be arranged

### **Tuesday 18 October**

LMG symposium: PROLONGING LIFE OR DEFERRING DEATH: THE ETHICS OF INTENSIVE CARE 5.45 pm Middlesex Hospital Medical School  
Not finalized

### **Thursday 20 October**

LMG symposium: GRANNY BATTERING: HALF A STEP FROM EUTHANASIA? 5.45 pm Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead

Dr Michael Green, consultant physician in geriatric medicine, Royal Free Hospital; Mr David Hobman, director, Age Concern; Dr Alex A Baker, consultant psychiatrist, Gloucestershire Clinical Area

### **Monday 24 October**

NMG symposium: PATIENTS BEFORE LECTURES? - A LOOK AT MEDICAL EDUCATION 5.15 pm New Lecture Theatre, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle

Professor Philip Rhodes, Regional Postgraduate Institute for

Medicine and Dentistry, University of Newcastle; Professor J Stevens, Professor of Orthopaedic and Traumatic Surgery, University of Newcastle

### **Tuesday 25 October**

LMG symposium: ORGANS FOR TRANSPLANT SURGERY: IS THE LAW THE HEART OF THE MATTER? 5.45 pm St Bartholomew's Hospital  
To include:

Dr Anthony Hopkins, Physician in Charge of the Department of Neurological Sciences, St Bartholomew's Hospital; Professor Kenneth Hobbs, Professor of Surgery, Royal Free Hospital; Mr Ian Kennedy, lecturer in law, King's College, London

### **Thursday 27 October**

LMG symposium: THE NO TOUCHING EPIDEMIC: AN ENGLISH DISEASE? 6 pm St George's Hospital, Tooting

Dr Elizabeth Stanley, lecturer in sexuality, St George's Hospital; Dr Murray Last, PhD, department of anthropology, University College, London; Dr Wilfred Barlow, Department of Rehabilitation, Wembley Hospital

### **Thursday 3 November**

BMG lecture: MORE WOMEN DOCTORS IN THE NHS: CATASTROPHE OR BLESSING? 5.30 pm Clinical Lecture Theatre, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham

Dr Una Kroll

### **Thursday 3 November**

LMG lecture: PREPARATION FOR DEATH 5.45 pm St Thomas's Hospital

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

### **Monday 7 November**

MMG symposium: PRIVATE MEDICINE - PUBLIC SCANDAL? 5.30 pm Withington Hospital, Manchester

Professor J C Brocklehurst, Manchester University Department of Geriatric Medicine; Mr Nigel Keddie, consultant surgeon, Manchester Royal Infirmary

**Tuesday 8 November**

LMG lecture: CHILD ABUSE: CHANGES IN MEDICAL AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS 5.45 pm St Mary's Hospital Medical School

Dr Christine Cooper, consultant paediatrician, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle Upon Tyne

**Thursday 10 November**

LMG symposium: ALCOHOLISM IN THE YOUNG 6.15 pm Westminster Medical School

Dr Max Glatt, consultant psychiatrist, St Bernard's Hospital It is hoped to present one or two patients.

**Thursday 10 November**

BMG lecture: ART THERAPY: GROWTH, AUTONOMY AND CHANGE 7.30 pm Lecture Theatre, School of Nursing, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Bristol

Diane Halliday

**Monday 14 November**

MMG lecture: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS TODAY: WHAT CAN DOCTORS AND PATIENTS EXPECT? 5.30 pm Medical School, Manchester

(Chairman) Dr Peter Merry, consultant in rheumatology and rehabilitation, University Hospital of South Manchester; Mr M C T Morrison, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon

**Tuesday 15 November**

LMG film: BIRTH WITH R D LAING 5.45 pm University College Hospital Medical School

Dr Heinz Wolff, consultant psychiatrist, University College Hospital; Professor Peter Huntingford, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Mile End Hospital

**Thursday 17 November**

BMG lecture: MOVEMENT AS THERAPY 7.30 pm Lecture Theatre, School of Nursing, Bristol Royal Infirmary

Veronica Sherborne, lecturer in education, Bristol Royal Infirmary

**Saturday 19 November**

NMG day conference: WILL YOU STILL NEED ME, WILL YOU STILL FEED ME, WHEN I'M 84? New Lecture Theatre, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle

Speakers to include: Dr E Woodford Williams, Mrs E Smith, J Beecham, Dr Ashcroft, Professor Grimley Evans

**Tuesday 22 November**

LMG symposium: BREEDING FOR A BETTER SOCIETY 6 pm Charing Cross Hospital, Fulham

Professor G R Dunstan, Professor of Moral and Social Theology, King's College, London; Professor Sir Cyril Clarke, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Liverpool

**Thursday 24 November**

LMG symposium: WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE NHS? 5.45 pm Guy's Hospital Medical School

Professor Ian McColl, Professor of Surgery, Guy's Hospital; Sir Francis Avery Jones, consulting physician, Central Middlesex Hospital; Mr Rudolf Klein, Senior Fellow, Centre for Studies in Social Policy; Mr John Banham, Principal at McKinsey and Company, Inc.

**Monday 5 December**

NMG symposium: FIT FOR THE FUTURE - THE WAY AHEAD IN NEWCASTLE

Speakers not finalized

**Tuesday 6 December**

LMG symposium: PORNOGRAPHY: IS IT DAMAGING? 5.45 pm Middlesex Hospital Medical School

Dr R D Catterall, Director, James Pringle House, Middlesex Hospital; Dr Sidney Crown, consultant psychiatrist, The London Hospital; Mr Peter Webb, lecturer in art, Middlesex Polytechnic, author of *The Erotic Arts*; a representative of the BBC

**Thursday 8 December**

LMG symposium: SCHIZOPHRENIA: CAN THE FAMILY COPE? 5.45 pm Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead To include:

Professor John Wing, Professor of Social Psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry; Mrs Peggy Pyke-Lees, General Secretary, National Schizophrenia Fellowship

**Complete lecture lists**

For fuller details, complete lecture lists are available from the secretaries of the medical groups listed below. Please enclose a stamped addressed A4 envelope.

**EDINBURGH MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Kenneth Boyd, EMG Project Office, 24 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, EH3

**NEWCASTLE MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Michael Best, Department of Family and Community Medicine University of Newcastle, 23 St Thomas Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE7 7RN

**SHEFFIELD MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Martin Hayes-Allen, 183 Whitham Road, Broomhill, Sheffield, S10 2NS

**GLASGOW MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr John Dagg, Department of Medicine, Gardiner Institute, Western Infirmary, Glasgow, G11 6NT

**BRISTOL MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Christopher Lovell, Department of Rheumatology, Bristol Royal Infirmary, Bristol, BS2 8HW

**BIRMINGHAM MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Martin Brueton, Department of Medicine, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Edgbaston, Birmingham, 15 2TH

**MANCHESTER MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Mary Lobjoit, The Teaching Unit, Withington Hospital, Nell Lane, West Didsbury, Manchester, 20 8LR

**LIVERPOOL MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Colin Powell, Sub-Department of Geriatric Medicine, School of Community Health, Mount Pleasant, PO Box 147, Liverpool, L69 8BX

**CARDIFF MEDICAL GROUP**

Dr Patrick Coyle, University Hospital of Wales, Heath Park, Cardiff, CF4 4XW

## News and notes

### Knighthood for the President

It is with pleasure that we record that the Rt Hon Lord Amulree, MD FRCP FRCGP, President of the Society for the Study of Medical Ethics, was awarded the KBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List for services to medicine and welfare.

At a dinner on 29 June former student officers of the London Medical Group presented Lord Amulree with a bound volume of Annual Reports in recognition of his Chairmanship of the Governing Body since 1966.

### Recognition for the Director of Studies

In recognition of his services to the London Medical Group, the Director of Studies, the Reverend Edward Frank Shotter, has been made Prebendary of St Paul's Cathedral by the Bishop of London, and will be installed on 23 September.

Prebendary Shotter has been appointed Honorary Chaplain to the Society of Apothecaries of London for the year 1977/78.

### Grants for the Edinburgh Medical Group

The Leverhulme Trust Fund has awarded a grant of £35,000 over three years in continued support of research on the study and teaching of medical ethics. Grant holders, on behalf of the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Medical Group, are the Deans of the Faculties of Medicine and Divinity and the Director of the Nursing Studies Research Unit. A further grant, of £21,000 over three years, has been awarded by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust.

### Annual conference of the LMG: Human sexuality

'This year the LMG is 14 years old

and it's time we talked about sex', said Dorian Haskard, a clinical medical student at the Middlesex Hospital and this year's President of the London Medical Group, in opening the conference. 'Before Freud, childhood was seen as a time of sexual innocence, a Garden of Eden. . . . Childhood has not looked the same since. . . .' observed Dr Malcolm Pines in his paper on 'The sexual element in professional relationships'.

These quotations, taken from the proceedings of the 14th Annual Conference of the LMG, aptly sum up the Victorian attitude that sex should not be mentioned in public and certainly 'not in front of the children'. This view still prevails: the almost complete lack of discussion of topics related to sexual behaviour in the medical curriculum (leaving aside the short course on sexually transmitted diseases) is but one example; but attitudes are changing. The conference, held in the spring of this year at the Royal College of Surgeons, was entitled 'Human sexuality' and sought to examine past and present attitudes to human sexuality and their influence on members of the medical and other caring professions.

Professor Robin Du Boulay, Professor of Medieval History at Bedford College, London, in the opening paper reviewed the institution of marriage throughout history. Although his session was entitled 'From secrecy to openness', Professor Du Boulay argued that the process was in fact going in the opposite direction: from the openness of the middle ages to the secrecy of the Victorian era which still largely remained. His co-speaker in the session, Dr Jack Dominian, discussed attitudes to prepubertal, premarital, marital and extramarital sexual activities and to sexual variants in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Mr Partick Trevor Roper

introduced the second session, 'In the eye of the beholder', by pointing out that man is a visual animal, so that the eye 'in sexual terms is the seducer and the surrogate, but it is also the great emancipator'. The eye was given just this opportunity when Simon Wilson and Peter Webb, both art historians, illustrated their contributions. Simon Wilson spoke on 'Celebrating the erotic' and dealt mainly with the works of Stanley Spencer. Peter Webb compared pornography with erotic art and concluded that pornography could lead to exploitation, whereas erotic art 'presented a celebration'.

The third session, 'Promiscuity: A cause for concern?', reached no such conclusion. 'No, I don't think promiscuity is a cause for concern', said Dr Martin Cole, before proceeding to present his case. Valerie Riches, of the Responsible Society, disagreed and offered a carefully argued case for the opposition. The audience was left to continue its own discussions over lunch.

The session on 'The sexual element in professional relationships', which brought together two eminent colleagues from the Maudsley Hospital, Dr Malcolm Pines and Professor Sir Denis Hill, ensured that the Conference was related to clinical experience. Dr Pines presented an in-depth psycho-analytical view of sexuality in the doctor/patient and doctor/nurse relationship, while Professor Sir Denis Hill discussed the role of the GMC in protecting the public and maintaining the good name of the medical profession. Sir Denis Hill emphasized the moral responsibility of doctors and of others in the health caring professions who did not have a council to watch over their professional standards of conduct.

The conference concluded by discussing 'The meaning of sex'. Not an easy topic since sex, as Mrs

Claire Rayner pointed out, meant different things to different people at different times. As an 'agony columnist', Mrs Rayner received up to 40 000 letters per year, and many of these were concerned with sexual problems. The meaning of sex to the writers of those letters was the theme of her paper. Mr Peter Righton, himself a homosexual, discussed the meaning of sex to the homosexual in general in a society which still largely refused to admit that such a group existed. He argued that homosexuals were no different from heterosexuals in many ways; they were happy in their choice of a sexual partner. He asked whether or not bisexuality was in fact the norm. Professor Enda McDonagh, a leading Roman Catholic moral theologian from Maynooth, Republic of Ireland, in the final contribution to the conference considered the celibate as a sexual being. He argued that sexuality was not simply limited to genital sexuality, but was a facet of our total moral attitude which centred around our reaction to people as individuals.

As in previous years, the annual conference was oversubscribed; facilities limited the attendance to about 430. However, a comparison of the attendance figures for this conference on 'Human sexuality' with last year's conference on 'Death: The conspiracy of silence' shows an interesting point. Of the 300 or so students attending last year's conference 66 per cent were medical students, while 12 per cent were nursing students. (Student social workers, students of theology and other students accounted for the other places.) In this year's conference on 'Human sexuality', the proportion of medical students rose to nearly 80 per cent of the student participants, whereas the proportion of nursing students dropped to only 2 per cent of the student participants, ie, 248 medical students and only eight student nurses. Of the 100 or so places reserved for professional participants, the proportion of doctors, clergy and social workers remained roughly the same for both conferences.

By comparison with previous

conferences, the fact that a far higher proportion of the applications from medical students were received by post, rather than by personal application, suggests that there still exists a certain reticence in discussing human sexuality, if not a conspiracy of silence, with the apparent exception of schools of nursing.

M PAPOUCHADO

# Society for the Study of Medical Ethics

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The Society for the Study of Medical Ethics is an independent, non-partisan organization for the multidisciplinary study of issues raised by the practice of medicine.

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

Since 1963 the London Medical Group, a student group for the study of issues raised by the practice of medicine, has arranged a series of lectures and symposia, now twice weekly throughout the academic year, in the 12 London teaching hospitals and medical schools.

In 1967 the Edinburgh Medical Group was established with similar aims, and subsequently medical groups have been formed in a majority of the British medical schools—currently Newcastle, Sheffield, Glasgow, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Cardiff.

In 1972 junior doctors, who had themselves been associated with the London Medical Group, founded the Society for the Study of Medical Ethics to develop these aims at a postgraduate level.

DOCUMENTATION in Medical Ethics, superseded as the organ of the Society by the *Journal of medical ethics*, is now produced as the proceedings of the annual conference held in conjunction with the London Medical Group.

In 1975 research fellows were appointed by the Edinburgh Medical Group which has established, in conjunction with the University of Edinburgh, a research project in medical ethics and education. This is funded by the Leverhulme Trust Fund and the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust.

The Society for the Study of Medical Ethics is a registered educational charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. It relies on voluntary grants and donations and is not supported from government sources.

There is no individual membership of the Society. Those interested in this work are invited to subscribe to the *Journal of medical ethics*. The lectures of the London Medical Group and the other associated medical groups, although addressed primarily to medical, nursing and other students, are open to all those professionally interested. There is no charge.

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