



Newsletter

Bioethics Research Centre

From the Director's Desk

THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS

As my Scottish temperament tries to get used to the onset of summer in December, I realise that already eight months have passed since I came to Dunedin to take up the post of Director of the Bioethics Centre. This newsletter is designed to keep you in touch with our plans. It is a modest production, since we await the result of the University's Development Appeal to give us some of the resources that will allow us to expand our publications. But there is too much to tell to wait for the professional touch - and perhaps some of you who read this can help us with suggestions of sponsors for our specific projects, such as the setting up of a library and resource collection in bioethics, the establishment of a fully financed post-doctoral and visiting scholars programme, and the appointment of an Associate Director (Publications).

The Centre was of course established before I came, and I would like to pay tribute to the pioneering work of the Acting Director, Gareth Jones, who guided the Centre from its inception in 1988, and somehow combined this with headship of a major university department and with a steady

flow of publications in bioethics. Another major influence in the development of the Centre has been my colleague, Grant Gillett, who took up his post as Senior Lecturer in Medical Ethics in 1988, and has already spread the reputation of the Centre worldwide with his numerous publications, conference lectures and major initiatives in teaching and research.

So I have stepped aboard a moving ship - and its speed has certainly not decreased! In the restricted space of this newsletter it is hard to give a full picture of present activities and future plans. So instead we offer a series of snapshots, in the form of features compiled or written by different people associated with the Centre.

In **Research Underway** (compiled by the Director) we describe current research and publication plans.

In **Travels Abroad** we ask one member of our Steering Committee to describe a visit to a comparable centre overseas.

NZ News (compiled for this issue by Grant Gillett) gives an update of recent events of significance for Bioethics in New Zealand.

Finally, **Centre Diary** (compiled by our Secretary, Christine Cooper) describes some of the conferences and events of the past year and outlines plans for 1991.

RESEARCH UNDERWAY

The Centre already has its first postdoctoral fellow, **Carl Elliott**, who comes with an MD from the Medical Univ. of South Carolina and a PhD in Philosophy from Glasgow University. Carl's current research includes work on two forthcoming books, with provisional titles: Innocence and Insanity and The Incomplete Person.

Kristin Kenrick is completing a B. Med.Sci in Bioethics, with a thesis on informed consent to surgery, based on an empirical survey.

Robyn Carey is about to begin a summer studentship, with joint supervision from the Centre and Clinical Oncology on the assessment of quality of life in cancer treatment. This represents a pilot study for what will be a major research project in this area.

Alastair Campbell, Grant Gillett and **Gareth Jones** are co-authoring a book for Oxford University Press on practical medical ethics, to be published late in 1991.

The research aspect of the Centre will be further developed as funds become available, and suggestions for projects and sources of research funding will be welcome.

NZ NEWS

A recent outcome from the Cartwright Enquiry has been the finding of the Medical Council in the case of Professor Dennis Bonham. This related to his duties as Head of Department and Chairperson of the Hospital Medical Committee at National Womens Hospital during the period of the Cervical Cancer Enquiry. The Council decided that Professor Bonham had to bear joint responsibility for this project with the principal investigator Professor Green. They considered that a particularly serious aspect of Professor Bonham's involvement in the project (amounting to 'disgraceful misconduct') was the failure to attend to the requirements for informed consent in a trial which involved significant risks to patients in the management of a potentially life-threatening disease. This decision has put the profession on notice that the Medical Council plans to be diligent in the enforcement of standards of informed consent to research and clinical treatment, and it has highlighted the need for clearer guidelines on informed consent to treatment.

Another major event recently has been the NZMA statement on AIDS. One of the issues covered in this statement is the recommendation concerning protection of a third party at substantial risk because of their sexual relationship with an AIDS sufferer. The Medical Association endorsed the principle that provided that suitable safeguards have been met and every attempt had been made to resolve the problem by counselling, the doctor could notify an at risk and identifiable third person of the patient's HIV status. This is not only in accordance with recent recommendations by the British General Medical Council and responsible ethics opinion worldwide, but also does a great deal to clarify what would be regarded as a reasonable standard of medical practice on this contentious issue, and is therefore highly welcome.

The 'networking meetings' of Chairpersons of health board ethics committees have resumed, and a considerable amount of fruitful work has been done by them in clarifying major and recurring issues affecting researchers and clinicians in all parts of the country. It is to be hoped that this growing consensus will mean that there is increasing protection for patients and guidance for researchers.

The Health Research Council Act, which came into effect in October 1990, contains statutory provision for an Ethics Committee whose remit will include the issuing of guidelines on the ethics of research and advice to local

ethical committees. The Director of the Bioethics Centre has been appointed to this Committee, and its production of guidelines, etc will be reported as they appear.

A new Government has taken over in New Zealand, and it remains to be seen whether the Health Commissioner Bill, which establishes a Bill of Patients' Rights and a Patient Advocacy Service will find its way into legislation. Watch this space!

TRAVELS ABROAD

From late May until early July 1989 Barbara Brookes was a Visiting International Scholar at the Hastings Centre in Briarcliff Manor, New York. While there she pursued research into the medical profession and the history of sterilisation in twentieth century Britain.

Barbara Reports:

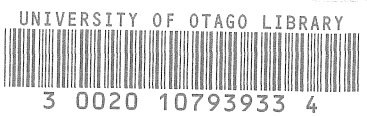
"My time at the Hastings Centre was extremely valuable. The daily lunchtime informal discussions and weekly seminars were always challenging. The breadth of interests represented at the Centre, ranging from medical and philosophical to legal and public policy specialists, created a great forum for debate. I was fortunate to be able to attend a symposium on Maternal-Fetal Relations which brought together people from throughout the USA and to participate in the Centre's 20th Anniversary Meeting and Celebrations. I presented a progress report on my own research and a lunchtime seminar on current bioethical issues in New Zealand.

The Centre provided an excellent and hospitable place to work. I valued the opportunity to discuss ideas and my time there enabled me to familiarise myself with current American bioethical issues."

For information on the Hastings Centre (and its publication: *The Hastings Centre Report*) write to:

The Hastings Centre,
255 Briarcliff Manor,
New York, NY 10510,
America.

CENTRI



During 1990 staff of the Centre have been involved in the following seminars and conferences in Dunedin:

Lunchtime seminar - "Ethical constraints on health care management".

Weekend Seminar - "The End of Life: ethical and legal issues".

3 lunchtime seminars - "Beginning Life". Topics for the seminars were: "The new genetics - where is it leading?", "Use of Embryos and Foetuses in Research", "The Right to Reproduce".

Open lecture by Obstetrics & Gynaecology Visiting Professor I.D. Cooke - "Ethical Aspects of Reproductive Technology"

Amnesty International Debate - "Are you free tonight?"

15th Biennial Conference of NZ Dental Association, Dunedin - Ethical issues in dentistry".

RANZCP Satellite Symposium - Philosophical issues in Psychiatry.

Nursing Practice Forum - "Ethics & Nursing"

Visits abroad have been made to the following centres and universities:

Hastings Center, New York; Kennedy Institute, Washington; Duke University, North Carolina; Institute of Religion, Houston; Institute for Medical Humanities, Galveston; Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Santa Clara University; Center for Biomedical Ethics, Minneapolis; Harvard University; Brown University; Columbia University; University of Edinburgh; University of Wales (Swansea); University of Oxford.

Among conferences addressed by the staff were:

Commonwealth Law Conference, Auckland
First UK Conference on Nursing Ethics, Swansea.
50th Jubilee Conference, NZ Animal Production Society,
Hospice 90, Adelaide, Australia
"Towards Collaboration", Wellington School of Medicine.

1991

Details of next year's seminars will be published in the February 1991 newsletter.

Visiting scholars to the Centre will include:

Professor William F May (SMU, Dallas); Professor Howard Brody (Michigan State University); Dr Peter Toon (St. Bart's, London).

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