

## A FUTURE FOR ETHICS COMMITTEES

A number of new structures announced recently will ensure that ethical review processes will continue without interruption as the new health structures come into existence on July 1.

The Government has decided to establish a *National Advisory Committee on Health and Disability Ethics*. Enabling legislation will be included in the Health and Disability Services Bill, and will put New Zealand among the very few countries that have made positive statutory provision for the appraisal of both research and clinical ethics.

The new committee will advise government on national standards for ethics committees, accreditation and monitoring of regional ethics committees, health and disability ethical issues of national significance, and on performance of regional ethics committees. It will also issue guidelines on ethical issues and procedures for regional ethics committees.

A number of interim bodies have been established to cover the period of transition to the new structure.

An *Interim Ethics Taskforce on Health and Disability Service Ethics* will have a number of roles. One will be to make recommendations on the detailed functions, long term reporting structure

and interrelationships of the proposed National Advisory Committee with other agencies also concerned with health and disability issues, such as the Health Research Council. Additional functions are to review the 1991 standard for ethics committees, and the operations of existing committees with a view to recommending a long term reporting structure for ethics committees and related matters. The Interim Ethics taskforce will also make recommendations on the interim accreditation and monitoring of regional ethics committees, and on a structure to ensure Maori input into ethical review.

There has been considerable concern in recent years about the ethical issues surrounding new birth technologies. Responding to this concern, government has moved to establish in *Interim Assisted Reproductive Technologies Committee* to examine proposals for assisted reproductive technology. This committee will operate in accordance with the existing standard for ethics committees, and report to the Director-General of Health. The committee is to be chaired by Rosemary de Luca, who currently chairs the Waikato Area Health Board Research Ethics Committee. (Following the February 1993 conference on "Ethics in Health Care Decisions", this committee accepted the task of

coordinating a working party to develop guidelines on assisted reproductive technology for submission to the then hoped for national committee on ethics.) The other members of the Interim Committee are Alison Douglass, Lady Jocelyn Keith, Janet Elder, Dr Rakhusana Majeed, Audrey Jarvis and Rose Smith. Professor A V Campbell, the Director of the Bioethics Research Centre, has been appointed as an advisor to this Committee.

The Minister of Justice is also studying assisted reproductive technologies. Mr Graham has announced the appointment of a two person ministerial committee. Papanangi Reid, a medical researcher, and Bill Atkin, a reader in law have been asked to find out what is happening in the field in New Zealand, and overseas, and to report back in a year.

Present ethics committees will continue in this period of transition to a functioning National Advisory Committee. Responsibility to fund and administer them passes from the Area Health Boards to the Regional Health Authorities. RHAs will be directed to fund and service committees to at least the 1992/93 level. Committees will continue to operate under the 1991 standard for Ethics Committees.

### Third International Bioethics Seminar on Neurological Disorders & Society

to be held from 19-21 November 1993

Fukui Chamber of Commerce Building  
Fukui, Japan

The Seminar will be a satellite meeting of Human Gene Mapping 1993 Congress (HUGO), in Kobe 14-17 November.

For further information contact;

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