

New Name

The Bioethics Research Centre has had a name change. As from the beginning of the year our name is now the Bioethics Centre. A marked increase in teaching commitments has changed the emphasis of the Centre and the change in name is designed to reflect this.

New Staff Arrivals

At the end of 1998 two new staff members were appointed to replace Dr Barbara Nicholas and Dr John McMillan, who both left during the year. Neil Pickering from Swansea in Wales will be the first to take up his appointment as Lecturer within the Centre. Neil has a broad interest in bioethics and has researched and published on many topics including: genetics, medical humanities, ethical issues in mental health, resource allocation, reproductive medicine, ethical review of research, and ethical issues in child health. We are all eagerly awaiting Neil's arrival and are looking forward to working with him.

Dr Jing-Bao Nie, originally from China but more latterly from North America, is the second appointment. Jing-Bao is qualified in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and has studied extensively in bioethics and medical humanities. Jing-Bao's interests in bioethics include: abortion in China, medical humanities, cross-cultural ethics, qualitative research, and philosophy of medicine. Jing-Bao will be a valuable addition to the staff and we extend a very warm welcome to him and his family as they move from Minnesota to New Zealand.

Lynley Anderson has also been appointed as a lecturer part-time.

Travels

In November Professor Donald Evans attended the first Emirates International Congress on Perinatology in Abu Dhabi where he presented three papers entitled: 'The limits of perinatal practice', 'Successful outcomes in perinatal medicine', and 'The status of the perinatal patient'. Professor Evans then went on to the UK where he was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Health Sci-

ences at Oxford University, during which time he read a paper entitled 'Medicine as a form of social control'.

Professor Grant Gillett is currently at Oxford University following a trip through India. More on his travels in the next issue.

Visitors to the Centre

Dr Martyn Evans will be visiting and working at the Centre during March and April of 1999 to help with the teaching load until the new staff come on board. Martyn was a colleague of Professor Donald Evans at Swansea University where they collaborated on a number of projects. Martyn took over position as Director when Donald moved to New Zealand.

Summer Studentships

Prior to Christmas two medical students were awarded Health Research Council summer studentships in ethics. These grants allowed Chris Jackson and Ben Campbell to work on projects in bioethics over the summer months. Chris Jackson has spent his time exploring the dimensions of the student/patient relationship particularly pertaining to informed consent and confidentiality. Prior to the completion of his project, Chris will be reviewing the policies at Otago Medical School. Meanwhile, Ben Campbell has been examining the question of inducements in health research. This study will involve an assessment of national guidelines on this topic.

Research Project for the Health Funding Authority – National Waiting Time Project

Also over the Summer months Professor Donald Evans, with the assistance of Neil Price (a fifth year medical student and Centre graduate) has been conducting research for the Health Funding Authority into the ethical issues involved in the National Waiting Time Project. The project has involved an appraisal of the arguments already in the literature and raising other ethical issues surrounding this topic.

through in new and fresh ways. And I'm going to miss working with some of the amazing women associated with the centre, both as staff and as students, who have the courage to work in new ways and do research into areas that have been ignored or minimised in the past.

OBR: What do you consider to be the ethical issues that will face us in the future?

BN: I think the ethical issues are going to be on two fronts. There are the high profile ethical issues of how we use new technologies, and how we deal with immediate clinical situations. For instance, how we are going to integrate our understanding and knowledge of genetics into how we offer medical care. But I think there are some more significant ethical issues that are to do with the health implications of our social and political ethics. How we are going to structure society so that everybody is able to be adequately cared for and valued, if indeed we think such things are important? And how are we going to respond to larger social forces that seek to change social practices and associated values for the sake of economic benefit; for example, the pressures of transnational companies who wish us to take on certain environmental and health risks with respect to genetically modified organisms, or the increasing involvement of private health providers in delivering basic health services? What values inform our understandings of what it means to be a community together?

Ethics is about asking critical questions, not about answers. It is about opening up issues to look at the values that are operating, and who benefits and who is silenced. If we can do this then I think we can make a major contribution to the conversations about how we can deal with rapid social change. There is a risk that society will ask people in ethics to be authority figures, to take the role that was traditionally fulfilled by institutions such as the church, to provide society with the 'right' answers to difficult questions. I think that if we buy into that as ethicists then we have not fulfilled our responsibilities, which are more about helping people to open up questions and to think through and to live through difficult situations.