

Book Reviews

Alan R. Rosenberg, Editor

CASE STUDIES IN MEDICAL ETHICS. By Robert M. Veatch. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. & London, England. Pp. 424. 1977. \$16.50.

The biological revolution has given great powers to medicine. It is now possible to keep a patient's cells alive virtually indefinitely with artificial respirator, artificial cardiac pace maker, artificial tissues, and intravenous feeding of artificial food. Electrodes can now be implanted in the human brain to evoke movements, repress aggressive impulses, and relieve heretofore intractable pain. Human life has been created in a laboratory. Medical ethical problems that once were not more than entertaining speculations about the future are now a reality. Although the exotic ethical issues get the headlines, the less dramatic problems are still the most important: when to withhold the truth from a patient, when to break a confidence, how to break a confidence, why the patient's consent is important, how the dying patient can be treated humanely. Because "a moral mistake can be literally a life-or-death disaster, medical ethics can no longer be regarded as dessert in the smorgasbord of medical education. Physicians must no longer be educated as technical geniuses and moral imbeciles."

This volume is a collection of case studies in medical ethics which originated with the founding of the Institute of Social Ethics and the Life Sciences in Hastings-on-Hudson, where the author is currently a Senior Associate. It begins by recognizing the fact that one can not do any ethics, especially medical ethics, in the abstract. It is real-life, flesh and blood cases which raise the fundamental questions. The chapters and issues within the chapters are arranged so as to lead systematically through the questions of ethics. Although the main purpose of the book is to provide a collection of case studies from which may be built a more comprehensive scheme for personal reflection, the first chapter in the book addresses itself to more theoretical issues. This important and all too short chapter attempts to construct a framework of the basic questions which must be answered in any complete and systematic system of medical ethics. In order to take a complete and systematic ethical position the author states that five questions must be asked:

1. What makes right acts right?
2. To whom is moral duty owed?
3. What kinds of acts are right?
4. How do rules apply to specific situations?
5. What ought to be done in specific cases?

The first two parts of this volume emphasize the over-arching problems of how to relate facts to value, of who ought to decide, of health care delivery, confidentiality and truth-telling. These are among the larger questions of medical ethics. Part III shifts to cases involving specific problem areas. Cases in Chapter 7 raise the problems of abortion, sterilization and conception control. Chapter 8 moves to the related problems of genetic counselling and engineering and of intervention in the pre- and perinatal periods. The next chapters take up in turn the problems of hemodialysis transplantation and allocation of scarce medical resources; psychiatry and the control of human behavior; human experimentation, consent, and the right to refuse medical treatment; and finally death and dying. Case illustrations of particular interest to the psychiatrist are: the psychiatrist as double agent, confidentiality, computer banks, and social welfare; the child's IQ; abortion for psychiatric reasons; justice and efficiency in care for the mentally retarded; the mentally retarded kidney donor; psychotherapy for the violent alcoholic; psychosurgery for a sexual psychopath; how informed is informed consent?; cancelling consent for electroshock treatment; and the right to refuse psychoactive drugs.

Dr. Veatch has done all of medicine, including psychiatry, a great service in the exposition of his ethical stance. The field of medical ethics resounds with many problems, and Dr. Veatch is to be congratulated for dealing with the issues in such a straight-forward and understandable fashion. This volume is recommended without reservation to all who would acquaint themselves with medical ethics and the practical application of solutions to such problems.

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THE LAW AND MENTAL HEALTH. By J. Curran and T. W. Harding. World Health Organization, Geneva. Pp. 161. 1978. \$15.00.

These are times of rapid changes in the law, both in the United States and abroad. In what is amounting to a worldwide spread of the ideology of individual rights, mental health law is expanding and modifying more than many other legal areas.

One questions whether changes of law lead to changes in practice; yet undeniably in some measure they do. No doubt in the United States there has been significant modification in mental health practice because of legal developments. Perhaps one should also inquire, though, whether in practice the new legalities do more harm than good (maybe better inquire who, if anyone, benefits, and similarly, who suffers? Balancing help against harm is also important.).

Of course, the first problem is to ascertain the present state of the law and to compare it with previous legal situations. The task of doing so on a world basis is what Curran and Harding attempt in this work.

The efforts required are monumental; results must represent a compromise. There were not the resources to carry out a comprehensive summary of national laws on such a broad encompassing area as mental