

## BOOKS REVIEWED

DECIDING TO FOREGO LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT: ETHICAL MEDICAL, AND LEGAL ISSUES IN TREATMENT DECISIONS. A Report of the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research. March 1983. Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. 554 Pp.

Reviewed by Nathan T. Sidley, MD

The Commission report reflects the necessary concern of government in medical decisions not only because of concern with costs but also because disputes over such decisions are often decided in a court, which is a government facility. Court decisions must reflect government policy, at least as stated in law. Of course, that the field affects many citizens also should make it a legitimate governmental concern.

In any controversial area, government policy must try to resolve different interest-group positions so as to minimize polarization of society. If the differences of interests among the groups aren't too deep and fundamental, that can sometimes be done. Indeed, that seems to be the case in this field. To a considerable extent relative to decisions about prolonging life, there is a consensus, often silent, about acting reasonably in such situations.

"Acting reasonably" means allowing life to stop when there is nothing to gain by protracting it and when suffering is increased by doing so. Whereas practitioners previously tended not to act reasonably because of fear of either criminal prosecution or a malpractice suit, they now are less fearful of such sanctions and act more in accord with their consciences.

The report approaches the issue of life prolongation by making certain distinctions. The most important of these is whether the patient is competent. If the patient is competent, the report recommends that his/her informed decisions be respected. (The law has had that view for a long time.) "Natural death" statutes that provide the format and context for a person to decide in advance that he/she does not want his/her life artificially prolonged are reviewed, and a "model bill" is reproduced.

If a patient is incompetent, the decision must be made for him/her by a legally empowered surrogate. The Commission prefers that a "substitute judgment" criterion be used for such decisions (that is, based on what the patient would have wanted). If not, it is recommended that decisions be made on the basis of the decision makers' appropriate perception of what is in the best interests of the patient.

The report assumes that an individual acting as surrogate decision maker in such circumstances faces significant pressures; a potential review of decisions is considered desirable. Many problems exist for such a review, but the report

seems most inclined to emphasize institutional review committees of heterogeneous composition.

Overall, the report appeared to be a very good summary of the issues and the relevant literature, done by sensitive and concerned people. It was a little moralistic (I have to confess that it usually arouses some negative feelings when people tell me I "should" do something) but not to an offensive point. The report should be useful to an ordinary doctor, but because of its length and detail should be seen as more relevant to an ethics committee member, to an attorney who might have to handle a case involving these issues, or to someone who is a student of moral philosophy. For the active practicing physician, an abstract of the critical points would be easier to assimilate and more useful. □

**PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND EXPERT TESTIMONY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO FORENSIC WORK.** By David L. Shapiro, PhD. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983. 256 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by Richard Rogers, PhD

This book was designed as a basic handbook of forensic evaluations and is geared to primarily those inexperienced in conducting such evaluations. Material is presented in a concise and highly readable format, examining both criminal (that is, competence to stand trial and criminal responsibility) as well as civil (for example, child custody and personal injury) forensic evaluations. It outlines legal and clinical issues in conducting these evaluations and provides a wide selection of case vignettes to illustrate or underscore the parameters of such assessments.

This book is especially helpful in its presentation of material on how to be an effective expert witness, offering an excellent discussion of how to foresee and respond to commonly employed cross-examination techniques. In addition, chapters on family law and treatment issues distinguish themselves with their helpful distillation of key forensic issues. Partly as a result of its introductory approach to a diverse range of forensic evaluations, several important forensic issues are given only cursory attention. This is particularly notable in the discussions of malingering, amnesia, and neuropsychological testing for which the overviews do not provide sufficient information for the beginning practitioner. In summary, *Psychological Evaluation and Expert Testimony* achieves much of its purpose in providing a concise and lucid description of forensic evaluations. I strongly recommend this book for the inexperienced forensic clinician. □