

Update from the Director, Kevin Voss on an Upcoming Conference...

Autonomy is an overriding principle in medicine these days. As many of you know, autonomy is a fusion of two Greek words meaning "self rule." In medicine autonomy simply means, "I have the right to say what happens to my own body." Patient autonomy is expressed in several ways during the day-to-day routine of medical practice, as in regulations concerning proper informed consent and the protection of patient confidentiality. Confidentiality at hospitals is so closely guarded that sometimes pastors are not even allowed to know if their parishioners are in the facility.

From a medical perspective, decisional patients have the right to refuse any treatment, even if that refusal will result in their death. Control of medical decisions has been gradually taken away from health care providers. In years past, doctors didn't always tell patients what they were doing or why. Before the 1960s, it was commonly-accepted medical practice for physicians not to reveal the presence of terminal diseases if doctors thought that knowledge of those diseases would be harmful for their patients. Some of you might have seen the old TV series *Marcus Welby, M.D.* In that show, Dr. Welby was the typical beneficent doctor, one who always did what was best for his patients whether they liked it or not.

The days of Dr. Welby are long gone, but several ethicists are beginning to question the primacy of patient autonomy in medicine. On April 12, 2005, Columbia St. Mary's Hospital System (CSM) and the CBI will co-host an all-day conference on the topic, "The Ethics of Professionalism: Is There a Role for Paternalism Anymore?" The conference will take place at two sites. The morning session will be at CSM Columbia Campus (near UWM) and the afternoon session will be held at CSM Milwaukee Campus (the eastern end of North Avenue). Mark Kuczewski, a nationally-known bioethicist, will offer the keynote. Art Derse and Ryan Spellecy, both from the Medical College of Wisconsin, will give presentations. Mark Repenshek, Health Care Ethicist for CSM, and I will participate on panel discussions.

This seminar is appropriate for health care providers and pastors. Continuing Medical Education credits will be offered. Please check out the CBI website for updates on conference details or call (262) 243-4398. Cost for the conference (which includes breakfast and lunch) will be \$20. Can't make it? We are also working on offering the conference on streaming video via the CBI website at www.concordiabiethics.org. Projected cost for remote webcast access is \$10.

Update on a Brain-Damaged Woman Who Talks after 20 Years...

Sarah Scantlin was a vivacious 18-year-old. She had just been hired to work at an upscale clothing store and had won a spot on the drill team at Hutchinson Community College. So she decided to party with her friends. That was in 1984, when on her way back to the car from a teen

club, she was hit and seriously injured by a drunk driver. She suffered a severe form of brain damage and could only blink her eyes to communicate. Late last week, it was revealed that after 20 years she had begun to speak! It seemed to happen accidentally. Apparently, the nursing home director was working with a group of other residents, trying to get them to talk. She had gotten one resident to reply, "OK," when suddenly from the background Sarah blurted, "OK, OK." Intensive work with a speech therapist was then begun. Doctors really don't know why Sarah began to speak. Traditional medical thinking had always been that once a brain was severely damaged, nothing could be done. I believe this case has tremendous implications for the Terri Schiavo case, the woman from Florida who some consider to be in a persistent vegetative state since her brain was deprived of oxygen in 1990. Although Terri's parents continue to seek legal recourse, it appears that eventually Terri's husband, Michael, will be granted permission to withdraw her feeding tube. But more on that in a future issue of *CBI Bioethics Update*.

Update on the Concordia Center for Bioethics (Abbreviated CBI)...

Later this month Dr. Voss will be traveling to Madagascar along with Prof. John Pless of Concordia Theological Seminary and Rev. Michael Roth, Michigan District 3rd Vice President. Dr. Voss will be speaking to pastors and health care providers concerning the medical and ethical aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is ravaging all of sub-Saharan Africa. Believe it or not, the Malagasy Lutheran Church is about the same size as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The trip offers a tremendous opportunity for the CBI to extend its mission to the world. Please keep Dr. Voss in your prayers as he travels from February 24 to March 5.

The continued existence of the CBI is due to the gracious support of an anonymous donor. However, existence is not enough. We would like to reach out and do more by turning the CBI into one of the premier Christian bioethics centers, but we are limited by cost considerations. If you would like to help support the mission of the Concordia Center for Bioethics, please contact us. We need your help!

CBI Needs: Prayer for Kevin Voss and for the work of the CBI; Secretarial help; Necessary office supplies; Bioethics library; *CBI Bioethics Update* video; CBI brochure; Costs for hosting annual bioethics conferences; and website maintenance. For \$120 you may become a CBI Bioethics Associate Member. Thrivent matching funds are available for donations to the CBI.

Update on Upcoming Events...

- April 2, 2005: Dr. Voss to speak at the State of Illinois Lutherans for Life Annual Convention held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Belvidere, IL.
- April 12, 2005: Columbia-St. Mary's/ CBI joint bioethics conference.
- November 11, 2005: LCMS Sanctity of Life Committee, Lutherans for Life and the CBI co-sponsor a national bioethics conference at the Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet, St. Louis, Missouri.

The purpose of the Concordia Center for Bioethics is to serve Jesus Christ and humanity by bringing the power of the Gospel and guidance from God's Law to help people make decisions compatible with the Christian faith on issues in biology and health care.