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Connections

Trees—that marvelous symbol of life and growth—are at the same time a poignant reminder of death and rebirth. Walking in the woods in winter, crunching the dried leaves that will form the humus from which new life will spring, one is reminded of this cycle of life, of the inescapable connection between one phase and another.

So too at the end of life, when the foliage of daily activities is stripped away, the connections between this phase and the next, and between the dying person and his or her loved ones, become more real. At this time of transition, the support of family, friends, community, and dedicated caregivers is all the more vital.

In last month's *Health Progress*, we looked at what Catholic healthcare facilities and systems are doing about pain management, a critical challenge for those who would provide compassionate care for the dying and chronically ill. This issue's special section, while touching on that issue, focuses more generally on supportive care of the dying. Two research reports—one on spirituality and healing, the other on survey tools organizations can use to improve their end-of-life care—bracket the section. In addition, Rev. James A. O'Donohoe of Covenant Health Systems addresses the church's position on care of the dying, and Rev. William Beers outlines how a Baraboo, WI, coalition is improving care decisions, understanding, and spiritual care for terminally ill persons.

Since our last issue, we've heard from several readers whose programs were not highlighted in the pain management article. We plan to follow up in future issues, so please let us know what you're doing. After all, forging connections among caregivers is one important way we can raise our standards in care of the dying.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

As we enter the year 2000, another potential (well, inevitable) death looms ever closer—that of our planet. The festive millennium celebrations and worldwide goodwill they engendered stand in sharp contrast to the gravity of the environmental problems facing our beleaguered planet.

What does this mean for Catholic healthcare leaders? In addition to the individual responsibility each of us must assume, organizations too must do what they can to halt the rape of planet Earth. Ethicist Leonard Weber challenges providers to "recognize and act on a responsibility to avoid the potentially harmful effects of the hazardous waste that is generated in the provision of healthcare services." And Timothy Smith, executive director of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, highlights a tool healthcare organizations can use to address pollution and other social problems: their power as investors to propose resolutions at companies' annual meetings.