

Evaluating Ethics Committees

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Imagine that a Mr. Brown lies in a hospital breathing his last. Nothing can be done to save him. Aware of this, Brown tells his doctor and nurse that he does not want his body autopsied. Unfortunately, poor Brown's wishes are not transmitted to the hospital pathologist, who—believing that postmortem exams are crucial to medical science—performs the autopsy anyway. After all, it can't hurt Brown and may well benefit others who suffer from the illness that killed him. What should the hospital's policy in autopsy cases be?

Increasingly, health care leaders turn to ethics committees to help resolve such questions. Because that's so, we've made these groups the subject of this issue's special section.

Our guest editors are Ron Hamel, PhD, CHA's senior director, ethics, and Scott McConnaha, a CHA editor specializing in ethics. Our lead article—by Francis Bernt, PhD, and Fr. Peter A. Clark, SJ, PhD, both of St. Joseph University, Philadelphia; Josita Starrs, RN, MS, Lankenau Hospital, Wynnewood, PA; and CHA's own Sr. Patricia Talone, RSM, PhD—describes the results of a recent survey of ethics committee chairs concerning their groups' role, impact, and future.

Also in the section are pieces on integrating clinical and organizational ethics (which inspired the case of Mr. Brown, mentioned above); a "next generation" ethics process at St. Joseph Health System, Orange, CA; an ethics consultation service at Providence Health Service Oregon Region, Portland, OR; and a corporate ethics committee at Sisters of Mercy Health System, St. Louis.

GLASER ON REFORM STRATEGIES

Also in this issue is a column by an old *Health Progress* friend, John W. "Jack" Glaser, STD, who argues that the phrase "Covering the Uninsured" frames the issue of health care reform in a flawed and ultimately self-defeating way. It's a piece that should provoke discussion in the ministry. We'd like to hear what readers think of it.

APOLOGY

Our January-February special section on quality and safety was brought together by Aimeé DeVoll, a CHA communicator whom we neglected to credit. She did a fine job. We apologize for being remiss.