

INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Community Representatives Discuss Issues at Health Policy Forum

Part of the Center's mission is to promote awareness of and dialogue about some of the most challenging ethical dilemmas faced in health care today. Many of these dilemmas are encountered because of complex and often conflicting and unjust health policies. In order to gain insight from those closest to the development and implementation of health policy in Nebraska, the Center organized its first Health Policy Forum held on the Creighton campus on March 7, 2005. In ancient Roman cities, a forum was a public square or marketplace used for judicial or public business -- an open place where an exchange of ideas could occur. The Health Policy Forum is built on this idea of a gathering place for sharing concerns and perspectives. Fifteen key leaders from state government, service providers, third party payers and advocacy groups in Nebraska participated. The purposes of the Health Policy Forum were to provide the opportunity to exchange information regarding the most current and pressing issues in health policy and to identify mutually beneficial projects that address these issues. Participants were asked to come prepared to respond to the following question: "From your perspective, what is the most pressing health policy issue facing the state of Nebraska?" Faculty members from the Center for Health Policy and



Health Policy Forum participants discuss issues that have the most immediate and critical impact on Nebraskans.

Ethics also attended the Forum and facilitated the discussion.

As was anticipated, the perspectives of the participants in response to this question were strongly influenced by the role they play in health policy. An executive summary of key points and common themes was developed and distributed to Forum participants. Many of the common concerns expressed by the participants such as the cost of health care, personal responsibility for health, and equity and access are shared by the country as a whole. A few concerns arose that are especially problematic in the state of Nebraska such as the differences in urban and rural health delivery and the demography of the state. Nebraska is unique among other states in the country because

the majority of the population exists in the eastern one-third of the state causing an imbalance in the availability of health services and public health care. Additionally, the influx of immigrants from Central America and Africa to Nebraska has placed additional burdens on health care and social services in rural communities. Feedback from the participants indicates that this type of face-to-face interaction was informative and helpful, and they are interested in continuing the dialogue. Plans are being made for another session of the Forum that will focus on one of the themes identified in the executive summary.

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So Small a World...

Azerbaijan, my native land, and a Soviet Union satellite for 73 years, became independent fourteen years ago. With independence came the weight of many problems: economical crises, bureaucracy, lack of transparency and poverty. The public health systems in post-soviet countries still have not been replaced by a well-designed health structure.

Although international organizations provide huge financial support in Azerbaijan directed at child survival, prevention of infection and sexually transmitted disease and primary health care reform, health indicators are slow to improve. Many moral principles and rules of the old system remain operative. The Soviet health care system was based on the Hippocratic Oath that was included in a formal health law and used by doctors as a guide in their routine activity.

In spite of the fact that informed consent is part of health law in Azerbaijan, doctors continue to treat patients paternalistically and without consent. Ethics and health law are not taught to medical students and health professionals. Ethics committees in clinical facilities do not function. To take real steps towards public health progress and a transition toward democracy, we need a massive intervention of modern ethics, legislation and regulations.

When I worked as a medical program coordinator of the Soros Foundation in Baku, Azerbaijan, I found that one of the main priorities of the program was the implementation of ethical and moral standards in the public health system. Because these issues are of great value also for other countries in the Caucasian region, we organized a regional conference on medical ethics in Georgia in November 1999 for the three republics of the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan. It was the first regional event on ethics. I had the honor to serve as faculty at that conference, at which Center for Health

Policy and Ethics (CHPE) faculty contributed – Ruth Purtilo and Beth Furlong also served.

In order to further develop collaboration and implementation of ethical standards in the health education of Azerbaijan, the next conference took place in Baku in September 2000. The conference was called “Teaching Methods in Medical Ethics” and it included teaching staff and students of medical institutions from Azerbaijan and faculty from Hungary, Georgia and the US. I was fortunate to meet again with CHPE members Ruth Purtilo, Beth Furlong and, now, Richard O’Brien.

In 2005, I was awarded a grant from the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) to study “Ethical Issues in Public Health



Dr. Valikhanova in her office at CHPE with a small flag of Azerbaijan on her desk to remind her of home.

Policy” for four months in the US. I asked to work with my colleagues from CHPE in Omaha. So, I’m here now, deeply impressed by the people, their hospitality and high professionalism and especially the friendly and hard working atmosphere in the Center for Health Policy and Ethics. We have common plans and ideas for future collaboration. I hope it is not my last meeting with my colleagues. Why not? It is so small a world...

***Dilara Valikhanova, MD, PhD,
Visiting Scholar***

Dilara Valikhanova, MD, PhD, from Azerbaijan, is our newest Visiting Scholar. She attended medical school at North Ossetian State Medical Institute, Vladikavkaz City, North Ossetia Republic of Russia and has a PhD in Medical Sciences from the Academy of Medical Sciences in Moscow, Russia. In addition to teaching operative surgery and organ transplantation in Azerbaijan State Medical University, Baku, she headed a laboratory for experimental surgery in their Scientific Research Institute of Clinical Medicine.

Since 1996, she has worked for the International Humanitarian Field as a Public Health Coordinator for the Soros Foundation, UNICEF, and is now involved in the Save the Children of Azerbaijan program. She was selected to come to the United States – and CHPE – by the Contemporary Issues Program of the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX).

Dr. Valikhanova participated in the development of laws on organ transplant in the Parliament of the Azerbaijan Republic in 1999. Together with the Albert Schweitzer Institute for Humanities US and funded by the Soros Foundation, she planned, organized and implemented the seminar, “Teaching Methods in Medical Ethics,” in Azerbaijan in 2000, in which CHPE faculty members participated.

Distinguished Lecturer Discusses Mindfulness

The Center co-sponsored Distinguished Lecturer, Ronald M. Epstein, MD, professor of family medicine and psychiatry at the University of Rochester, NY, for a talk entitled, "Mindfulness as Professional Competence. "Mindfulness," he reminded the audience, "is paying attention, on purpose, to one's own mental and physical processes during everyday tasks to act with clarity and insight." The fostering of a mindful clinical practice entails setting expectations of self-awareness; participating in reflection groups such as hallway discussions, with patients in the office and among individual mentoring. It also demands the asking of reflective questions: "What latent errors might be present in this situation? What would a trusted peer say about the way you managed this situation? How might your prior experience affect your actions with this patient? What interfered with your ability to observe, be attentive to or be



Dr. Ronald Epstein and Dr. Gail Jensen at the 2005 Distinguished Lecturer Presentation in the Boys Town Auditorium.

respectful with this patient? How could you be more present and available to this patient?"

A mindful health system requires vigilance, tolerance of complexity and ambiguity, a critical curiosity, a sensitivity to how the *system* operates, open communication, informed flexibility and a deference to expertise.

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Spirituality in Medicine Important to the Patient and the Physician

Daniel P. Sulmasy, OFM, MD, PhD, presented the Cardoner Lecture, "The Healer's Calling," sponsored by CHPE on April 14. He discussed how health professionals can renew their transcendent commitment to their vocations by recognizing and invoking the spiritual character of their service. Dr. Sulmasy characterized professionals' healing encounters with those in need of restoration of proper relationships as encounters with Christ (in the person of the patient) and as witness to God's power and love of each of us. He drew on scripture, particle physics and social theory to illustrate his points. In conclusion, he observed that the health care system in which we now function is in need of healing — of restoration of right relationships — so

that health professionals can more properly live their vocations and serve those in need of personal healing.



Dr. Daniel Sulmasy presents ideas from his new book, *The Healer's Calling*, at the Cardoner Lecture.

Sulmasy holds the Sisters of Charity Chair in Ethics at St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center in New York and is Professor of Medicine and Director of

Presenter Clarifies the Question of Informed Consent

In a Clinical Ethics Session, sponsored by CHPE and the Department of Medicine, entitled, "When Patients Refuse: The Delicate Balance Between Indifferent Respect and Illegal Paternalism," Dr. Jos Welie argued that clinical care providers, ethicists and attorneys alike tend to ask the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Did the patient agree to the withdrawal of life-support?" we should ask "Did the patient agree to the (continued) provision of such support?" Informed consent is a necessary condition for any medical treatment except in medical emergencies. Thus, without a patient's consent for treatment, it may not be commenced or continued.



Dr. Jos Welie fielding questions from the audience after his presentation.

In the case of an incompetent patient, the same rule applies. Thus, in the Terri Schiavo case, the key question was not (or should not have been): "Had Ms Schiavo ever refused the feeding tube?" but "Had Ms Schiavo ever agreed to the feeding tube?" The burden of proof is always on the person who wishes to treat. The default position, in the absence of a consent, is "do not treat."

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Newsorthy Notes

Congratulations

Amy Haddad, PhD, has been appointed to the Governor's Pandemic Influenza Committee 2005-06. The committee will review information on influenza and advise Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services.

Winifred J. Ellenchild Pinch, EdD, RN, FAAN, has been conferred the honor of "Professor Emerita." Fortunately for CHPE, Dr. Pinch will continue to serve the Center as organizer of the annual Women and Health Lecture and of an invited conference scheduled for 2007 entitled, "Carrying on the Legacy of Bioethics in Nursing."

Judith Lee Kissell, PhD, and **Pirzada Sattar, MD**, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, have been awarded a grant from the Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society to provide research and host a conference (this fall) about the use of animal products in pharmaceuticals and sensitivity toward religious differences. If interested please email: jkissell@creighton.edu

Transitions

Chris Karasek, CHPE's Senior Administrative Assistant, has been promoted to Executive Secretary for Dean Timothy Austin's office in the College of Arts and Sciences. Congratulations Chris! We will miss you.

Justin Herrick is the Center's new Technical Specialist. Before coming to CHPE, Justin spent four years as the IT Manager for a Public School Service Cooperative in St. Cloud, MN.



Jos Welie, PhD, begins a year-long sabbatical in Rome, Italy, starting July 16, 2005. He will research the history and future of Jesuit health sciences education.

Calendar of Events

16th Annual Women and Health Lecture

Speaker: Elizabeth Berg

"Literature as Medicine"

Wednesday, September 14, 2005

Lauritzen Gardens

Omaha's Botanical Center

Underwriter's Reception, 6:00 p.m.

Author's presentation, 7:00 p.m.

Clinical Ethics Session

Speaker: John R. Stone, MD, PhD

National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care Tuskegee University

"Crossing Racial and Ethnic Divides: Trust and Trustworthiness in Healthcare"

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Morrison Seminar Room

Creighton University Medical Center

Roundtable

Speaker: John R. Stone, MD, PhD

"Responding to Reports of Healthcare Disparities: Justice, Diversity, Institutions and Bioethics"

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

CHPE Conference Room

FOCUS

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