From the Director’s Office

Guest Editor: Robert M. Veatch, Ph.D.

Transplant Ethics at the Institute

As I write this, I have recently returned from a meeting of some of the nation’s leading figures on transplant ethics to examine problems of fair allocation of organs to persons with mental retardation. It is now clear that some people are being excluded from transplant solely because of mental disabilities, which raises serious questions of fairness and equal access. It has given me an opportunity to reflect on the number of opportunities we have around the Kennedy Institute to be exposed to cutting edge exchanges with colleagues stimulated by a critical mass of expertise in all manner of bioethics thinking.

Senior Research Scholar and former Institute Director Ed Pellegrino has been leading the President’s Council on Bioethics through several months of meetings focusing on new controversies in transplantation. I had the opportunity to spend an hour-and-a-half presenting to the Council my sense of some of the new issues our society must face: whether to permit Internet solicitation of strangers as donors, whether to require persons to indicate on income tax returns if they are organ donors, whether to give organ priority to those who have signed donor cards and joined mutual aid organ donor organizations, whether to expand the pool of organ donors to include those with cancer or infectious diseases, and whether to begin experiments with market incentives for organ donation. We spent some time debating whether we should abandon the dead donor rule that limits the taking of life-prolonging organs from the deceased.

I also spent time recently with the Institute of Medicine’s Committee on Increasing Rates of Organ Donation chaired by former Kennedy Institute Senior Research Scholar, Jim Childress. The Committee has just released its state-of-the-art report entitled Organ Donation: Opportunities for Action.

The June issue of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal included the publication of Lainie Friedman Ross’s Institute-sponsored André Hellegers Lecture on “The Ethical Limits in Expanding Living Donor Transplantation” through the use of living donor exchanges to circumvent problems in blood incompatibilities, a lecture that stimulated an article1 proposing voluntary exchanges of organs to attempt to offset the imbalance in organs from persons of O-blood type.

In the past year our National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature acquired 53 books and reports, three videos, and 797 journal and newspaper articles, bills, and book chapters dealing with organ transplantation; these are all cited in the ETHX on the Web database. Fifty-five percent of these were subsequently selected and indexed for the NLM databases PubMed and NLM Catalog.

Over the past few months we have met with the NIH Bioethics Center fellows to explore new controversies in transplant, presented to the national Advances in Transplantation conference here in Washington on controversies surrounding retransplant, and met with transplant teams at Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles to examine questions about special priorities for children. Through the Washington Regional Transplant Consortium we have debated funding for transplant for indigent persons with Georgetown’s Chief of the Division of Transplant Surgery, Lynt Johnson, and the sticky problem of establishing priorities for liver allocation to


IBC – Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Going – June 4-9, 2007

We hosted our 32nd annual Intensive Bioethics Course this past summer, June 6-11, 2006, and — as is always the case for those of us at the KIE — met wonderful folks and had a busy and stimulating week discussing the issues of the day and the ideas that matter so much to all of us. Evaluations from our attendees were excellent, and the new lectures we added (Research Ethics, Race in Health Care Disparities, and Conflicts Among Principles and Theories) were well-received.

We were delighted to host 128 participants, including groups and individuals from 10 foreign countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, and South Africa. The “international flavor” of our conference is something we hope to capitalize on in the future, and have incorporated this aspect into our planning for next summer’s IBC.

The biggest change for IBC 2007 will be a date-adjustment. We revised our schedule to begin on MONDAY afternoon and end on SATURDAY following the banquet, allowing participants the option of enjoying a weekend in Washington, and/or staying over Sunday with a “free” day. The dates for IBC will be June 4-9, 2007, and the conference’s title is “IBC 2007: Decisionmaking and Choices in the 21st Century.” We are currently revising our applications for CME and Nursing credits and confirming the plenary speakers. Besides presentations on the “four pillars” of bioethics — autonomy, beneficence/nonmaleficence, and justice,” this year’s course will offer lectures on stem cell research, virtue ethics, the euthanasia debate, global perspectives in health care and justice, post-Schiavo issues, and a lecture...
patients needing small intestine as well as liver transplants with Tom Fishbein, Georgetown’s intestine transplant surgeon.

It is a joy to be able to spend my time at a research center providing an amazing collection of opportunities for timely scholarly exploration of a critical national issue like organ transplant. You are invited to visit our website (http://kennedyinstitute.georgetown.edu), attend our annual Intensive Bioethics Course in June, or make use of the wonderful library resources at our National Reference Center where these issues of organ transplant as well as a full range of issues in biomedical ethics are discussed.

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IBC 2006, continued

related to public health. We have invited a wonderful faculty and are finalizing time slots.

We have planned to implement a couple of other new ideas…two sessions of “doubled” small groups to bring groups in with joint leaders, and a new afternoon session tentatively titled “Affinity Groups.” This session will offer four concurrent venues (sign-up required) for interactive group discussion on topics to be determined. We are particularly hoping to offer a venue for our foreign participants to contribute their important stories and perspectives to the group at large.

The library will offer proseminars on Monday, June 4, with a choice of either a morning or afternoon session for interested participants. In addition, the Center for Clinical Bioethics will host a day-and-a-half companion conference, “Clinical and Organizational Ethics” that begins on Thursday, May 31, for those who wish to expand their week even more. Please see their website at http://clinicalbioethics.georgetown.edu.

We will do our best to get all information up on our website (http://kennedyinstitute.georgetown.edu) as soon as practicable. If this has whet your appetite for IBC and you haven’t attended in a couple of years, please join us again. We are also implementing a new policy on scholarships and hope that this will expand our reach—again, watch the website for new information and deadlines!

Mark your calendars now for an early date for this academic year’s Joseph B. Brennan Lecture! We are hoping that the early time slot will catch people at a time when there are fewer competing events. This is a not-to-be-missed lecture, “Less Safe, Less Free: Why We Are Losing the War on Terrorism,” and David is an acknowledged and sought after speaker. He will be returning to GU Law School from a semester in London.

New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis has called him “one of the country’s great legal voices for civil liberties today,” and former CIA Director James Woolsey has called David’s book, Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism (2003), “the essential book in the field.” In 2004, Enemy Aliens was awarded an American Book Award and the Heffner First Amendment Prize.

David’s first book, No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System, was named Best Non-Fiction Book of 1999 by the Boston Book Review, best book on an issue of national policy in 1999 by the American Political Science Association, and awarded the Alpha Sigma Nu prize from the Jesuit Honor Society in 2001. He has received recognition for his human rights and public interest advocacy including awards from the Society of American Law Teachers, the National Lawyers Guild, the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, the ABA Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the American Muslim Council, and Trial Lawyers for Public Justice.

The lecture will be held in the President’s Room, Riggs Library, with a limited seating capacity. Please RSVP to schofies@georgetown.edu (ph: 202-687-8099) not later than January 10, 2007.

The Brennan Lecture series was established with gifts from the Brennan Family and the law firm of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan, in honor of a three-generation relationship with Georgetown University.

New Colleagues in the Library

We are pleased to announce that Kathleen A. Schroeder, M.D., M.S.L., has joined the NRCBL staff as Reference Librarian. With the addition of Kathy’s background in medicine, staff now offer subject-matter expertise at the doctoral level for law, medicine, and philosophy. In addition to library science, advanced degrees in religion, history and related archival work, and public policy round out the scholarly expertise offered by the current staff. Language skills include French, German, Spanish, and Russian.

Mark Clemente, B.A., Project Researcher, has joined NRCBL to work on database development and manage the DOCLINE service (a document delivery program managed by the NLM). At American University, Mark earned a degree in philosophy with honors, studying in Chile, Cuba, and Mexico.

Upcoming NRCBL Events

March 29-April 1 Exhibit at American College and Research Libraries in Baltimore, MD
May 19-23 Exhibit at Medical Library Association in Philadelphia, PA
June 4 Library Proseminar and new Searchers’ Guide offered at IBC