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Genetic manipulation of plants and animals has a long and generally uncontroversial history, and the indirect manipulation of human genes by public health measures is an acknowledged fact. The treatment of established genetic diseases with normal DNA poses no special ethical problems. However, the areas of antenatal diagnosis and of DNA manipulation in human fertilized ova raise ethical questions that require improved education of the public.


The ethical requirement that psychiatrists expose colleagues who sexually abuse their patients conflicts with the ethical requirement of confidentiality. This impasse may be resolved by the judicial use of consultation.


Although the earlier idea of antisocial behavior being determined genetically has been discounted in favor of environmental influences, the concept of a genetic predisposition has persisted. "It is now clear that genes do not confer a certainty of criminal behavior" but nevertheless "genetic influences are probably among those factors which confer a liability" to the more common transgressions of the law.


Despite forces seeking to define it as a trade, medicine remains a profession. As such, it is an inherently moral, special activity with its own special moral duties and postures. "As a professional, man bears witness to the being of something higher and more enduring, participation in which can only be called a blessing."


Successful human in vitro fertilization is a difficult undertaking. Current information favors the view that this procedure has no harmful effect on the offspring nor does it raise any ethical problem in this regard. As for ethical problems of a societal nature, however, these are difficult to identify at present.


The subject of human experimentation has evoked emotional responses that have resulted in inappropriately stringent controls. While many regulations have a valid basis, some threaten the conduct of clinical investigation problems. The present phase of excessive control will pass, however, and the profession should learn from this experience.

August, 1983

Intimate body searches of individuals in police custody are a violation of medical ethics relating to the doctor-patient relationship unless performed with the full, free, and informed consent of the suspect, something that is at best difficult to obtain in these circumstances. Nevertheless, the Commons Committee considering the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill has rejected the objections voiced by the British Medical Association in this matter.


Psychosurgery continues to raise serious ethical and legal questions. Despite continuing study, there is still insufficient knowledge about brain function to permit unqualified approval of a surgical procedure that is irreversible.


In the nursing home milieu, how vigorously to treat a sick patient raises difficult ethical problems that involve, inter alia, the wishes of the patient, societal resources, diagnostic and prognostic difficulties, and legal aspects. It is time that the medical profession arrived at a consensus on this subject.


Although sex reassignment surgery is gaining acceptability for the treatment of gender dysphoric patients, the high success rate that is customarily claimed for the operation should be critically reassessed. It is possible that there may be many patients for whom psychotherapy is a more appropriate approach than surgery.