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Letters...

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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Some Plaudits

To the editor:

First, my thanks for continuing to send me your magazine. Being retired, it is difficult to afford the issues that are valuable. About 15 years ago, when I was on the AMA Committee of Medicine and Religion, Dr. Cavanagh first arranged for my introduction to your magazine.

Second, I quoted your magazine just last week to a doctor and staff at our local health clinic; I believe they were impressed.

Third, your articles are frequently far above those I read elsewhere, both intellectually and morally. The May, 1983 issue's articles on homosexuality and on "Playing God" are excellent. I have tried to do a little of what Dr. Johnson did in his article on "Playing God," but with much less competence. I could have used his insight many times in the past; I will use it the next time I am a substitute preacher.

Thank you and please thank Dr. Johnson and Fr. Harvey.

— Rev. Robert G. Pumphrey (retired)
(former rector, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Carson City, Nevada)

Letter from Finland

Strikes for better wages have entered the social picture of health care personnel in Finland. So far, physicians have twice threatened to strike, but these have been called off after negotiations. Pharmacists and, independently of them, nurses were, however, a month on strike last spring. The result was better pay for the pharmacists who are employed on private basis and for the nurses who are generally municipally employed. The gen-

eral opinion was on the side of the strikers who have constantly lagged behind in wages. The bill may turn out to be more expensive than the sympathizers expected. Patients attending health centers have thus far gotten medical attention free of charge, but they will probably have to pay fees for medical services as of 1984. Soon after the strike, hospital fees went up 10 to 20 percent. The strike of the pharmacists caused a slight rise in the prices of drugs.

In Sweden, an interesting legal case has been decided. A woman was inseminated by the sperm of an unknown donor; later the marriage ended in divorce and the husband refused to acknowledge the child who had been born. The court decided that since the man had been found sterile, he could not be the father of the child. Thus, this child has no legal father. The obvious injustice to the child has drawn the attention of legal authorities in Sweden as well as in Finland and it is to be expected that measures will be taken to guarantee the rights of children born in this way.

The Medical Board in Finland has issued an official document on terminal care. The paper is written in a surprisingly humane tone and lacks much of what one is accustomed to in writings issued by a bureaucratic institution. One of the most positive statements in the document is, in my opinion, that the Medical Board discourages extreme measures of prolonging life in a hopeless situation. This, naturally, shows that the Medical Board has a great deal of trust in the ethical backbone of Finnish physicians. It may also give physicians in difficult situations some support in decision-making.

The *Swedish Medical Journal* followed the development and outcome of a case where two trainees for midwifery refused to insert IUDs as part of their educations. They considered the IUDs

abortifacient and stated that insertion of the device was against their ethical conviction. The Medical Board in Sweden stated that IUD insertion has to be included in the training program and stated — somewhat surprisingly — that it is not proven that IUDs are abortifacient. The solution to this situation was that the students were given the option of inserting an IUD on a volunteer and then removing it in the same session, which made their training complete.

According to a poll, 93 percent of the physicians in Finland consider that the status and general opinion of the public of physicians has declined in the last 10 years. This is an alarming figure, since it may influence doctor-patient relationships. This opinion was shared in most of the editorials of the major newspapers, but no suggestions were made on how to remedy the situation.

— Robert Paul, M.D.

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