Current Literature: Titles and Abstracts

Catholic Physicians' Guilds

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Churchmen did, and some still do, hold that it is immoral to relieve the pain of childbirth because of God's utterance; "... in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children..." (Genesis, 3, 16). And yet no Catholic doctor of my acquaintance would subscribe to this. Again the unhappy episode over Galileo will be mentioned, and again it may be otherwise, even if it be difficult in all conscience not to accept that Churchmen had erred, however well the episode may be explained away.

The Church is completely opposed to unnatural methods of contraception as these are "contrary to the natural law" but is there a single development in medical science that is not equally "contrary to the natural law" and yet we do not hold anaesthetics or antibiotics to be occasions of sin?

And so the argument proceeds, something added at every step until there is made out a case for contraception that is exceedingly difficult to refute. It is wrong that we should go so far for so long about such intricate matters and how urgently we need the guidance of His Holiness... I began with a brief mention of the Lister dynasty. I think there may be an important lesson to be drawn from this, for us all, and to reflect upon one hundred years later.

There are so many grave problems facing mankind today and there are so many points of disagreement among nations. Finally there are many areas of agreement. Can we not therefore agree to disagree, and where we do in concord work together to alleviate hunger, suffering and poverty?

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October 1965

Material appearing in this column is thought to be of particular interest to the Catholic physician because of its moral, religious, or philosophic content. The medical literature constitutes the primary but not the sole source of such material. In general, abstracts are intended to reflect the substance of the original article. Parenthetical editorial comment may follow the abstract if considered desirable. Books are reviewed rather than summarized. Contributions and comments from readers are invited.


In the face of the rapid advance of medicine it is appropriate to re-examine its purposes. Are physicians concerned with disease? Is the treatment of the disease of the people of nature? In the final analysis, they are bound by the "traditional obligations towards the patient—any patient.

The doctor has learnt more about disease, and must go on learning; but he is, and must always be, a human being devoted first to human beings... For a person or a profession, to restore and help one's neighbour may be no small task. But the purpose is not a small one; nor is the privilege.


Although sexual and marital maladjustment constitute a major health problem, the medical profession has lagged notably in the field of sex education. To be sound, such education must begin in childhood. Scientific data supporting the "new morality" of sex freedom are largely unreliable. Mutual respect is essential to a happy marriage and is not fostered by premarital relationships. In lower animals this serves the sole purpose of procreation, but in man it has an additional psychologic purpose—to promote the emotional growth of husband and wife.

"A divine magnetism brings a young man and woman together. Life works its magic, and in selfless love and devotion they join hands as man and wife. They become as one. The heaven of their courtship materialize into living reality. Is it fair to teach youths a debased conception of sex that will deprive them of the richest experience of life?"

THE DYING PATIENT, terminal illness, telling the truth to patients with incurable disease—these topics continue to appear in the literature, suggesting again that the final word is a long way off. A representative collection of recent articles includes the following:


---: Heroic steps for terminal patients not favored; feelings among many physicians are to uphold death with dignity and a minimum of suffering. Med. Tribune 5:15 July 25, 1964.


Neither the course of pregnancy nor the condition of the fetus is influenced by Hodgkin's disease in the mother, and the course of Hodgkin's disease is not influenced by pregnancy. Therapeutic abortion need be considered only in cases where the fetus would be endangered by direct irradiation or where widespread disease requires systemic chemotherapy during the first trimester.

(1) pregnancy does not influence the course of Hodgkin's disease. (2) the presence of Hodgkin's disease, or a history of it, is not an indication for the termination of pregnancy or for therapeutic abortion.


Rock, J.: Let's be honest about the pill. J.A.M.A. 192:301-402 May 4, 1965. Much misinformation has been current about the so-called contraceptive pill, and has been disseminated for the obvious purpose of dissuading patients using such medication. Two tactics are employed by the dissenters. One approach is based on moral grounds and contends, incorrectly, that the pill's mode of action is not an abortion or that it is abortifacient, or that it establishes a chemical blockade in the uterus. The second approach seeks to create fear of physical danger to the pill, but such hazards have not been proven. Since child-spacing is a serious matter, "I would therefore deny responsible, and uninformed or poorly informed zealots, however well-meaning, to cause this premature abandonment of contraception by wishful speculation..."

CALLED by whatever name—human experimentation, drug trials, or clinical investigation—the use of man as the ultimate experimental animal deserves to pose problems for the physician. Surgeoning medical research has produced an increased need for such studies but the facts brought before the Nuremberg trials and after the thalidomide debacle have emphasized that the ethical implications are enormous. Nor is the debate confined to the medical literature. The experiments on cancer immunity conducted under the aegis of the Sloan-Kettering Institute in New York, revolving around the issue of informed consent, were discussed in detail in the February 3, 1964 issue of the New York World Journal. The Wall Street Journal, too, has probed the problem at some length. It is interesting to note that virtually all the voices raised (at least publicly) in this debate have been those of scientists rather than moralists, a somewhat anomalous situation that need not continue. The following is a brief sampler, categorized for convenience, of some recent contributions to this subject:


C. the Sloan-Kettering case:


D. the thymectomy case:


E. drug testing—legislative restrictions and legal liability:


F. use of volunteers:

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In two men, participation in a Curililo apparently precipitated an acute psychosis. Remission was rapid. A Curililo is an intense emotional experience from which a pathologically vulnerable individual may, as a protective mechanism, try to dissociate himself.


There is a general tendency to avoid telling the diagnosis and prognosis to a patient who has cancer. Patients are more knowledgeable about medical matters, however, than most physicians appreciate, and frequently learn the diagnosis from other patients or from the conspicuous reactions and attitudes of doctors, nurses, family, or friends. When trying to decide whether or not to tell a cancer patient the diagnosis and prognosis the physician should consider the possibility that such information has already been learned indirectly.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS of interest include the following:

February, 1966


___: Neurologist urges caution on anovulatory drugs; one or more syndromes found in 34 users. Med. Tribune 63: Nov. 8, 1965.


Wolf, G. A., Jr.: The problem of dehumanizing patients. *Med. Tribune*, 6:15 Nov. 3, 1965. (“As professionals, some of us are more humane than others, but rather than dehumanizing the patient, we are moving in the direction of gaining more basic information about what, indeed, is humanity.”)


(Editorial): Willing one's body. *J.A.M.A.* 194:824-825 Nov. 15, 1965 (“It is also important to note that spokesmen for the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths have indicated approval of the principle of donation of one's body for the promotion of anatomic science”).


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Lakartidning, M. S.: The practicing physician, the community, and the question of moralities. *Postgrad. Med.* 38:140 ff. Oct. 1965. (Dr. Y. de Vries is Executive Director of the SISCS, Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, Inc.)*


Holland, E. S.: Psychiatry's responsibility to medicine and to religion.


Religion and Medicine, formally constituted in June 1964; address of Organizing Secretary: 58a Wimpole St., London, W.1.)


Masse, B. L. (S.J.): The AMA and the Catholic press. *America* 113:583-588 Nov. 13, 1965. ("Why has the American Medical Association, which makes a most important contribution to this country's welfare, received little support from the Catholic press in its stand on Medicare?")


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**Minutes**

**General Assembly Annual Meeting**

**National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds**

Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois

November 6, 1965

**ROLL CALL:**

Reverend Kenneth P. MacKinnon Moderator

Very Reverend Harrold A. Murray Delegate of Episcopal Advisor

E. P. Griffin, M.D. President

F. M. Taylor, M.D. President-Elect

F. E. Verdon, M.D. Vice-President

S. J. O'Loughlin, M.D. Secretary

P. F. Cunningham, M.D. Past-President

Reverend J. Quinl, S.J. Omaha Guild

E. B. Loring, M.D. Omaha Guild

J. Harrison, M.D. Rockville Centre Guild (R.D.)

J. Masterson, M.D. No Va. Guild

The meeting was called to order at 12:15 p.m. by President Gerard P. J. Griffin and was opened with prayer by Reverend Kenneth P. MacKinnon, the Moderator.

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT**

President Griffin commented on the administrative problems encountered by the President of this organization, but felt that under the firm and experienced hand of President-elect Taylor, many of these would be resolved. It was again suggested that Miss Jean Read's efforts be confined to the publication of *The Linacre Quarterly* and that a substitute and replacement be found for her position as Executive Secretary. There was much discussion but no action was taken.

Cooperation of Guilds in the various projects of the National...