
William E. May

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medical practice is incompletely understood.

The blurb on the jacket addresses the book to “doctors and nurses in training” and “hospital and medical school libraries.” The $7.95 cost of the hardcover volume could be much better spent on a more authoritative work on medical ethics.

Reviewed by:
Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.
Stritch School of Medicine

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**The Courage To Fail: A Social View of Organ Transplants and Dialysis**

By Renee C. Fox and Judith P. Swazey

*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974)*

In this engrossing, informative, and richly documented work a sociologist (Fox) and an historian of science (Swazey) have teamed to give readers an exceptionally thoughtful and intelligent account of the social, ethical, and existential questions that are posed by recent developments in medical science.

They focus attention on two specific types of medical procedures: the transplantation of hearts and kidneys and the use of hemodialysis for the treatment of patients suffering from irreversible kidney failure. Following a case history approach, they examine in great detail such problems as the “gift-exchange” dimensions in both transplantation and organ donation, the “gatekeeping” role of the physician in determining who is to give and who is to receive, the ethics of experimentation on human subjects, and the criteria for the allocation of sparse medical resources. Throughout, their concern is to highlight the broader social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of medical research involving human subjects.

The chapter dealing with gift exchange and the gatekeeping function of the physician is particularly illuminating for showing how organ transplantation and hemodialysis place the donor (or administrator of hemodialysis) and donee in a human situation in which they can become related to one another either in a wonderfully transcendent way or in tyrannical bondage. Here the physician’s key role is to screen potential donors and recipients not only biologically but psychologically and sociologically as well so as to minimize the possibility of placing human beings into intolerable and dehumanizing bondage to one another.

In many of the chapters, and particularly in those concerned with the development of heart transplants and with the famous “case of the totally artificial heart” involving the noted heart surgeon, Denton Cooley, the prin-

February, 1976
cipal concern of the authors is with the ethics of human experimentation. They describe eloquently the temptations to which medical professionals, in particular those whose lives are dedicated to research, are exposed and the perils their craving for success present for safeguarding the humanity and dignity of the patients entrusted to their care. In my judgment the chapter dealing with the work of Drs. Cooley and Liotta, and the differences between their approach and that taken by Dr. Michael DeBakey is magnificently instructive, meriting the reflective considerations of everyone concerned with the broader moral and social issues of medical research.

Of great importance, too, is the section of the study concerned with the hemodialysis program pioneered by Benting Scribner in Seattle. Here the very difficult subject of developing morally justifiable criteria for electing and excluding potential recipients of a sparse medical resource is explored with sensitivity and perception.

In brief, this is a very important, instructive, and rewarding volume that raises basic questions and seeks to develop solutions to them that are consonant with a respect for the incalculable worth of human life.

Reviewed by:
William E. May
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