Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours

By Carl Elliott, MD, PhD

Last spring I spent a morning eavesdropping on a national conference here at the University of Minnesota. The conference was about the future of bioethics. Actually, “eavesdropping” may be a misleading term, since it implies that I was paying attention. When the conversation turns to budget decisions and tenure committees, I tend to nod off. Yet this particular morning did have its moments of clarity. The clearest of them came when a bioethics center director stood up and repeated what a donor had said to her while presenting her with a check: “Your field is full of charlatans and scam artists, and I want to know what you plan to do about it.” (In response to which Larry Churchill later remarked, “I wonder how he found out?”)

Later on that evening, over dinner with some of my fellow charlatans and scam artists, our conversation turned to the moral lives of ethicists. We wondered: are bioethicists generally any better or worse as human beings than, say, doctors, or lawyers, or moral philosophers?

From the Director ...

What Do We Want to Be When We Grow Up?

By Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH

The field of bioethics is at a crossroads. The Center, over its twenty year history, and other programs like it have become integral parts of medical schools, in academic health centers and across universities even as we struggle with how best to train graduate students, where best to appoint our faculty, and even whether our field should be considered a discipline unto itself. And as Carl Elliott asks in this issue of the Examiner, what is the role of bioethics and bioethicists in the institutions that house them? These are all germane questions as our field matures and attempts to decide what it wants to be when it grows up.

At a meeting hosted at the University of Minnesota in May, organized by the Center for Bioethics and the Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences (chaired by our colleague Susan Wolf), these and other issues were discussed by the directors of over fifty bioethics programs from across the US and Canada. The day’s discussions and recommendations are outlined in a summary article published in the July/August issue of the Hastings Center Report (Wolf and Kahn, 2005).

Jeffrey Kahn

An outcome of the meeting was an agreement that these discussions need to continue, in a forum where those who lead bioethics programs can share experiences, try out ideas and launch collective projects. To this end, work is in progress to launch a group for bioethics program directors. Stay tuned for the birth announcement.

References

Do bioethicists have any special responsibility to scout out ethical wrongdoing and point a finger at it? Does it matter if the wrongdoing is taking place at the very hospital or medical school where the ethicist works? What if the wrongdoer is another ethicist? How should such people be punished? Would it be excessively cruel to have them appointed Dean?

Many of the notable bioethical scandals of the past twenty years or so have occurred at universities with well-respected bioethics centers. One of the most embarrassing examples is the ALG (anti-lymphocyte globulin) scandal that was uncovered at the University of Minnesota in the early 1990s. But critics could also point to the Nancy Olivieri and David Healy affairs at the University of Toronto, Ferguson v City of Charleston at the Medical University of South Carolina, the recent congressional hearings into conflict of interest at the National Institutes of Health, and the shutdown of federally-funded research at Duke University and University of Illinois-Chicago, among other institutions. The worst such scandals have resulted in deaths, such as that of Jesse Gelsinger in a research study at the University of Pennsylvania and Ellen Roche at Johns Hopkins University. Bioethicists were involved in only a handful of these cases, of course. It would be unfair to blame them for the wrongdoing of others. But it is not unfair to ask what should be expected of bioethicists when such scandals emerge. Part of the rationale for funding bioethics and the medical humanities in universities is the notion that more centers, courses, task forces, policies and curriculum initiatives will produce health care workers and researchers who are more virtuous, more lawful, more compliant with regulatory policy. What would we do if bioethics were having the opposite effect?

Some scholars, such as my friend Françoise Baylis, have argued that bioethicists have a special obligation to speak out about ethical scandals at their own institutions. I can understand the impulse behind her argument, but it is hard to see this as a realistic expectation, at least as long as bioethics takes its current institutional form. As much as we might like to imagine bioethicists as braver and more valiant than ordinary academics, it would take a special breed of person to serve willingly as watchdog over their friends and colleagues (not to mention over the very people who are signing their paychecks, serving on their promotion and tenure committees, and funding their centers). The one case that bioethicists point to with some pride is that of Mary Faith Marshall, who testified against the Medical University of South Carolina in Ferguson v City of Charleston while she was employed there as a bioethicist. For her steadfastness, she was denied tenure.

From a sociological perspective, one of the most notable characteristics of North American bioethics is the extent to which it has become embedded in the structures of medical power that it seeks to affect. Bioethicists are now routinely employed by medical schools, hospitals, government bodies, professional organizations and the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. The Chair of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission during the Clinton administration served simultaneously as a member of the Board of Directors for Dow Chemical, and since that time has become a member of the Board of Directors for the Hospital Corporation of America. The next two presidents of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities come to the organization from the American Medical Association and NASA (by way of the University of Pennsylvania). Perhaps this is not surprising: if one aim of bioethics is to bring about social and political change, then it makes sense to do it from inside the institutions it aims to change. But is this the only way? Political pressure can be brought to bear on institutions from the outside as well. America has a vigorous tradition of political dissent, much of it arising from grassroots political movements, watchdog groups, and advocacy organizations. Yet this is an arena where bioethicists are almost completely absent.

This is a sociological observation, not a call to arms. Personally, I am temperamentally unsuited for membership in most organized bodies; this is why I work in a university. Nor am I quite as comfortable as many ethicists are with a move away from teaching and scholarship and towards social activism. Yet if bioethics is going to be socially and politically engaged, it is worth asking whether it is a healthy development for the field to be so heavily involved in the medical-industrial complex, with so little involvement in countervailing social forces. Why has bioethics become so much more hospitable to those who aspire to a seat with the suits around a conference table, rather than to those who are protesting outside?
Center News

Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, was promoted to full professor in May 2005; and awarded a National Library of Medicine (NLM), NIH grant for a project on ethics and pharmaceutical marketing.

Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, has been appointed as co-chair of the Task Force on Faculty Culture for the President’s Strategic Positioning Plan, University of Minnesota.

Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, has been appointed to the International Data and Safety Monitoring Board for the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease, NIH; and appointed Consultant to the Bioethics Review Committee on Human Subjects Research, Eurasia US Civilian Research and Development Foundation.

Steven Miles, MD, has been awarded the Paul and Sheila Wellstone Award for Leadership in Public Health 2005 by the Minnesota Chapter, American Association of Public Health; and the Excellence in Medical Education 2005 Award by the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Susan Wolf, JD, has been appointed member, Task Force on Collegiate Design for the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota; and named Executive Editor to Minnesota Journal of Law, Science & Technology.

Susan Wolf, JD, Principal Investigator and Co-investigator, Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, were awarded a NHGRI grant for their project on “Managing Incidental Findings in Human Subjects Research.”

Annual Bioethics Seminar Series

The Center for Bioethics hosts its annual bioethics seminars from 12:15–1:30 pm on the University of Minnesota campus, Minneapolis, MN. For information, contact the Center for Bioethics, or visit our website at www.bioethics.umn.edu.

OCT 14 “Global Health Inequalities and Bioethics” by Leigh Turner, PhD, McGill University.

NOV 3 “Comparative Stem Cell Politics: The View from Down Under” by Rachel Ankeny, PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney.

DEC 9 “Terri Schiavo: The Aftermath” by Ronald Cranford, MD, Faculty Associate, Center for Bioethics, University of Minnesota.

JAN 13 “How Clinical Trials Really Work: Rethinking Research Ethics” by Joan Liaschenko, RN, PhD, and Debra DeBruin, PhD, Center for Bioethics, University of Minnesota.

FEB 10 “Your Doctor Gets Paid for What?! Ethical Issues in Pay-For-Performance Modes of Physician Reimbursement” by David Satin, MD, University of Minnesota.

MAR 24 “Pharma Goes to the Laundry” by Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, Center for Bioethics, University of Minnesota.

APR 21 “Human Mistakes and Mishaps: Disability, Children, and Atavism” by Amy Laura Hall, MDiv, PhD, Duke University Divinity School.

Deinard Memorial Lecture on Law & Medicine

On January 31, 2006, David H. Kaye, PhD, Arizona State University College of Law, will speak on “Science in the Courtroom” from 11:30 to 1:00 pm, Mississippi Room, Coffman Union, University of Minnesota campus. This lecture is co-sponsored by the Joint Degree Program on Law, Health & the Life Sciences and the Center for Bioethics. For information, contact the Center for Bioethics.

Lecture Series on Law, Health & the Life Sciences

Visit the website at www.jointdegree.umn.edu for information on the 2005–06 lecture series offered by The Joint Degree Program on Law, Health & the Life Sciences and the Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences, University of Minnesota Law School.
The Center for Bioethics has been an important hub for discussion, research and policy recommendations on the important bioethics issues over the last two decades. This is the final of three issues of the Bioethics Examiner highlighting key events in the Center’s twenty year history. Here we highlight events from 2001–2005.

### 2001
- The Center offers CEU credits through an online course addressing ethical and professional challenges in genetic health care.
- The Center joins a five year project with North Dakota State University, South Dakota State University, and Iowa State University to create a consortium to address social, economic, and ethical aspects of biotechnology funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Center hosts a national conference on “Physician Assisted Dying: Assessing the State of the Debate” in Minneapolis, funded by the Death with Dignity National Center.
- Center faculty expands ethics education offerings in the Department of Philosophy; the School of Nursing; Genetic Counseling; Medical School; and by offering summer courses in Research Experiences of Undergraduates in Molecular Biology.

### 2002
- Minnesota Network for Healthcare Ethics Committees (MINHEC) relaunched. The Center for Bioethics is the Network’s administrative home.
- Joan Liaschenko, RN, PhD is jointly appointed as Associate Professor in the Center for Bioethics and in the School of Nursing.
- The Center works with the Department of Pediatrics to form a consensus group on pre-implementation genetic diagnosis and stem cell donation funded by the Fanconi Anemia Research Foundation.
- Steven Miles awarded the Distinguished Service Award from the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH) for leadership and his role in forming the ASBH.

### 2003
- The Center receives a three-year leadership grant from the Starr Foundation to support the development of a Bioethics Resource Center.
- Maryam Valapour, MD is jointly appointed as Assistant Professor in the Center for Bioethics and in the Department of Medicine.
- Center faculty John Song, Edward Ratner and Dianne Bartels are awarded $100,000 NIH grant for a project on “Homelessness and End-of-Life Care.”

### 2004
- The Center collaborates with the Weisman Art Museum as part of the exhibit Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics at the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum.
- A health care clinic for the homeless is established by Center faculty member John Song.
- Jeffrey Kahn named first holder of newly endowed Maas Family Chair in Bioethics.
- Center hosts the 20th Bioethics Institute for faculty in the life sciences and extension. Funded by the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council and the USDA.

“This for 20 years, the University of Minnesota has been at the forefront in asking and shaping clinical, ethical and legal questions and shaping clinical and health care policy. Established in 1985 as one of the country’s first multi-disciplinary bioethics centers, its work encompasses areas of health, law and ethics.”

— Brenda Hudson, editor Health Talk & You University of Minnesota
2004

- Center for Bioethics and the Joint Degree Program in Law, Health & the Life Sciences host a conference, “Genetic Testing and the Future of Disability Insurance: Ethics, Law & Policy” in Minneapolis, funded by NIH.

- Center faculty Joan Liaschenko, Debra DeBruin and Anastasia Fischer (Public Health Institute) receive funding for a project on “Nurses: Research Integrity in Clinical Trials” from the National Institute for Nursing Research, NIH.

- Carl Elliott named one of the top 10 authors in Minnesota by Mpls/St. Paul magazine.

2005

- “The Minnesota Center for Bioethics at 20: Coming of Age” a symposium to mark the Center’s 20th Anniversary.

- Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, is jointly appointed as Professor in the Center for Bioethics, and Associate Dean in the Medical School.

- John Song awarded a 2004 Gold Foundation Faculty Humanism in Medicine Award by Minnesota Medical Foundation; and the University of Minnesota 2004 Outstanding Community Service Award.

- Steven Miles is named 2004 Minnesotan of the Year by Minnesota Monthly, January 2005.


- Center hosts an invited conference on homelessness and end-of-life care on the University of Minnesota campus.

- The Center for Bioethics works with the University of Minnesota’s Stem Cell Institute and it’s partners to place the University of Minnesota at the forefront of research that will improve the lives of thousands of individuals.

- Special issues of The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics Symposium: Looking Forward in Bioethics 2004; 32(2) edited by Center faculty; and “Ethics What Guides our Practice” in Minnesota Medicine, June 2004.

- Bioethics Resource Center announces its newest publication on “End-of-Life Care: An Ethical Overview.”

- Bioethics Course designator is approved by the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.

- Center for Bioethics and the Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences host a working meeting on the future of the field of bioethics on the University of Minnesota campus, cosponsored by 15 bioethics centers, programs, and departments from across the country.

Bioethics at the State Fair—What the Public Thinks

“Can You Lick the Problem?”

For the second year at the Minnesota State Fair, the Center distributed more than 500 lollipops to participants that tried to lick the problem by answering one of three bioethics questions. Following are this year’s questions and results. See the Center website at www.bioethics.umn.edu for participant comments.

1. Should pharmacists be allowed to refuse to fill a prescription based on their personal religious or moral beliefs?
   - 12% Yes
   - 88% No

2. Who should have decided the fate of a 41 year old Terri Schiavo? Her husband or her parents?
   - 78% Husband
   - 16% Parents
   - 4% Both
   - 2% Undecided

   Was it right for the US Congress and President Bush to get involved in the case?
   - 10% Yes
   - 89% No
   - 1% Undecided

3. Should human embryos that are left over after assisted reproduction to be used for medical research?
   - 73% Yes
   - 24% No
   - 3% Undecided
Recent Faculty Publications

**BOOK CHAPTERS**


**ARTICLES**


Visit our website at
www.bioethics.umn.edu
The Center for Bioethics website includes:
- Information on graduate studies in bioethics, course offerings, and other educational programs
- Center faculty descriptions and their research interests
- Current and past issues of the *Bioethics Examiner*, Annual Reports, and Bioethics Overviews
- Upcoming events and announcements
- Links to other bioethics resources
Calendar of Events

Nov 8
Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, will speak on “Stem Cell Research—Pros and Cons” at the Minnesota Women’s Economic Roundtable, Minneapolis, MN. For information, email headmyers@aol.com.

Nov 9
David Satin, MD, will speak on “Clinical, Ethical, and Legal Aspects of Somali Patients’ Refusal of Caesarean Section” at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Nov 13
Carol Tauer, PhD, will speak on “Stem Cell Research Ethics” at Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN. For information, email stjoribo@usfamily.net.

Nov 14
Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “Global Health and the Frightened Empire” at the 2005 University of Minnesota Medical School Alumni International Distinguished Physician Award Program, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-625-7933.

Nov 16
Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “Prisoner Abuse at Abu Ghraib” at the Alden March Bioethics Institute Albany Medical Center, Albany, NY. For information, visit www.amc.edu/academic/ethics.

Nov 17
Dianne Bartels, RN, MA, PhD, will speak at the American Association of University Women (AAUW), Minnetonka, MN. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Nov 18
Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will speak on “Stem Cell Research: An Ethics and Policy Update” at Eisenhower Grand Rounds, Annenberg Center for Health Sciences, Rancho Mirage, CA. For information, call 760-773-4506.

Nov 22
Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will speak on “Stem Cell Research—Ethics and Policy Issues” for University of Minnesota Retirees Association, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-377-1075.

Nov 24
Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will participate on a panel “Conflicts of Interest: Concepts and Challenges” at Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research (PRIM&R) Annual Meeting, Boston, MA. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Dec 5
Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, will participate in a panel “Ethics of Stem Cell Research” at the National Society for Genetic Counselors Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA. For information, email sally.boult@stonebow.otago.ac.nz.

Dec 8
Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “Traveling in Foreign Countries: What You Should Know” at the Women on the Move Radio Program. For information, visit www.womenonthermove.us.

Dec 12–13
12/12 Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will participate in sessions on “Additional Considerations in Assisted Reproduction” at the Minnesota Section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-670-7810.

Dec 17
Dianne Bartels, RN, MA, PhD, will speak at the Minnesota Women’s Economic Roundtable, Annenberg Rounds, Philadelphia, PA. For information, email gary.marchant@asu.edu.

Dec 19
Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, will speak at the College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN. For information, call 218-723-6000.

Feb 2
Steven Miles, MD, will present two lectures at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN. For information, call 615-936-2868/615-343-6060.

Feb 12
Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will speak on “Who Says No? Decision Making and Ethical Considerations in Assisted Reproduction” at the Minnesota Section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-670-7810.

May 31
Steven Miles, MD, will speak at Samford University, Birmingham, AL. For information, call 205-726-2820.

Apr 6
Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will speak on “Ethics of Stem Cell Research” at the American Academy of Audiology Symposium, Minneapolis, MN. For information, email lyonkers@audiology.org.

Apr 13
Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “The Hippocratic Oath and the Ethics of Medicine” at Friends of Eastcliff Book Club, Minneapolis, MN. For information, visit www.bookstore.umn.edu/eastcliff.html.

Mar 31
Steven Miles, MD, will speak at Samford University, Birmingham, AL. For information, call 205-726-2820.
Center Faculty & Staff

**Center Faculty**
- Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH  
  Director and Maas Family Chair in Bioethics
- Dianne Bartels, RN, MA, PhD  
  Associate Director
- Debra DeBruin, PhD  
  Director of Graduate Studies
- John Song, MD, MPH, MAT  
  Director of Medical Education
- Carl Elliott, MD, PhD
- Joan Liaschenko, RN, PhD
- Mary Faith Marshall, PhD
- Steven Miles, MD
- Maryam Valapour, MD
- Susan M. Wolf, JD

**Post-Doctoral Fellow**
- David Satin, MD

**Faculty Associates**
- Muriel Bebeau, PhD
- Ronald Cranford, MD
- Barbara Elliott, PhD
- Rosalie Kane, PhD
- David Mayo, PhD
- Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS
- Edward Rattner, MD
- Karen-Sue Taussig, PhD
- Beth Virnig, PhD, MPH

**Resource Center**
- Amy Ward

**Graduate Assistants**
- Alicia Hall
- Barton Moffatt
- Susan Parry

**Administrative Staff**
- Chelsea Brink
- LeeAnne Hoekstra
- Candace Holmbo
- Karen Howard
- Kayla Martin
- Margaret O’Neill
- Ryan Scherf

Bioethics Courses offered Spring 2006

The Center offers classes under its new designator starting in Spring semester 2006.

**BTHX 5100 – Introduction to Clinical Ethics (3 cr)**
This course addresses the ethical issues inherent in the provider/patient encounter. It is designed to foster interdisciplinary study and dialogue about these important moral issues.

**BTHX 5900 – Independent Study in Bioethics (1-4 cr)**
Students propose area for study with faculty guidance, write a proposal, which includes outcome objectives, and work plan. The faculty member directs student’s work and evaluates the project.

**BTHX 8000 – Advanced Topics in Bioethics (1-4 cr)**
Advanced study of bioethics topics of contemporary interest
- Medical Consumerism (3 cr)
- Gender and the Politics of Health (3 cr)

**BTHX 8900 – Advanced Independent Study in Bioethics (1-4 cr)**
Students propose area for study with faculty guidance, write a proposal, which includes outcome objectives, and work plan. The faculty member directs student’s work and evaluates the project.

Contact the Center at 612-624-9440 or see the website www.bioethics.umn.edu for more information.