Bioethics and the Rise of Anti-Science

By Steven Miles, MD

The twentieth anniversary of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Bioethics is a time for reflecting on our work and more importantly on how the social context of our work is changing. Medical students created the Center. When their requests for medical ethics in the curriculum went unanswered, they packed special optional lectures until the Center was created. There is a lesson here: medical ethics is not always a welcome voice—it is a voice of scholarship but it is unavoidably a voice of social criticism. Society, like any institution, needs its critics.

The Center for Bioethics helped lay the foundation for the Schiavo case. At the Center’s inception, physicians did not even have the words for caring for dying patients. We cured or rehabilitated disability; the end of life was a failure and the care of those at the end of life was not our business. There were no hospices in Minnesota. The DNR order was born in Minneapolis. Hennepin County Medical Center’s ethics committee, the “Thanatology Committee,” was among the first.

As readers of the Examiner know, the Center celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. To mark the occasion, we threw ourselves a party in mid-May and invited many of the Center’s friends from over the years. It was heartening to see so many supporters of the Center gathered in the same room, and a testament to the hard work of so many over the last two decades. Most impressive was the collection of faculty, past and present, whose commitment to bioethics and the Center is the key to our success. It was a rare opportunity to have our colleagues in a room together and talking about the history of the Center, their work in bioethics and how it has evolved during their time at the University. We learned about the birth of the Center (from Dianne Bartels, Mila Aroskar, Muriel Bebeau, and Ronald Cranford). The two Center faculty who have left for other jobs—Arthur Caplan and Kathy Faber-Langendoen—returned to help us celebrate and to recount their time in the Center, as did one of our international post-doctoral fellows, Yasemin Oguz. The remainder of the program featured Center faculty discussing their work and perspectives on a range of bioethics topics, including end of life issues (Kathy Faber-Langendoen, John Song), reproductive technologies (Susan Wolf), enhancement technologies (Carl Elliott), research ethics (Debra DeBruin), and organ transplant (Maryam Valapour), as well as the Center’s international reach (Steven Miles, Yasemin Oguz, Joan Liaschenko). It was a rare opportunity for us all to sit together and hear about the work of our colleagues-reminding us what an interesting and accomplished group we have and giving us all reason for great pride in what the Center has accomplished over these twenty years. The talks were so good that we are collecting them in a publication—Bioethics at Minnesota: The First Twenty Years. Stay tuned for information on how to obtain a copy, and for more news as we plot the direction for the Center’s next twenty years and beyond.

Happy Birthday to Us

By Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH

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We pioneered nursing home supportive care policies. The case of Helga Wanglie, involving an unsuccessful legal attempt to discontinue a respirator and intensive care, started the debate about the medical duty to provide non-beneficial life prolonging care to patients who were permanently unconscious. The Center played a prominent role in promoting living wills and in improving end of life care by health plans. When the Center was born, physicians would quietly decide that “nothing more could be done.” Today, nearly two million deaths each year in the United States occur after the patient and their loved ones decide to choose comfort as the primary treatment objective over prolonging life. This consensus position has been enacted into law, supported by the courts, affirmed by the public, and withstood another trial by fire by ideologues. An author of “Terri’s law” quietly removed a feeding tube from his mother a few months after the law was enacted. Congressman Tom DeLay discontinued a respirator on his father, an act which neither he, nor I, would call “suffocation” although he does not hesitate to say that Ms. Schiavo was “starved.”

Center faculty have engaged many other issues. The new genetic sciences pose many issues including: genetic definitions of race and the emergence of race-based therapies, genetic screening for insurance, and issues posed by research on human embryonic stem cells. We work on the ethics of research using human subjects. We are active on the problem of people without insurance and on the care of the homeless and homebound. We have led on creating ethics curriculum for dental, nursing, and public health students. Our work has influenced the debates about enhancement technology, assisted reproduction, and gender assignment surgery. Many other issues could be mentioned. There is no Center ideology — we respectfully differ with each other on euthanasia and the relative priorities of various ethics issues.

When the Center was created, the issues were primarily debates about contending values. Today, science itself is under assault. Pharmaceutical manufacturers design research to hype benefits and conceal harmful side effects. Political pressure persuaded the Minnesota Health Department to post erroneous information suggesting that research showed abortion may cause breast cancer. High school students are ignorant of scientific research on the earth’s natural history even as they watch television newscasts calling for a tsunami warning system that would be based on the fact that the earth is a changing geologic body. Students come to medical schools, which increasingly use genetic science, ignorant of genetic phylogeny in part because of the efforts of creationists. Human health is endangered by political forces that seek to minimize climate change.

Anti-science is not a debate about religion versus science. The scientific revolution went hand in hand with Europe’s Reformation and America’s Great Awakening. Anti-science is not about moral conservatives versus liberals. Much of it is driven by business interests as in the way the tobacco industry abused science to protect their products. Minnesota’s Complementary and Alternative Health Care Practices Act similarly protects non-validated health care.

The rise in the public authority of “anti-science” will shape the work of bioethicists in the coming decade. Anti-science dismisses research about sex education, AIDS prevention, and the cost of universal health care. It causes our federal government to spend more protecting its buildings from the minimal danger of an anthrax attack than the immense danger posed by the global polio epidemic. It raises the bar for bioethics. We must be more than moral analysts; we must contest anti-science with a sound knowledge of responsible research. We must dismiss stories like the Raelian UFO cult clone story rather than use them to address the real ethical issues of cloning. And we must exemplify in our teaching and interviews the clear difference between seeking facts and debating values.
Mary Faith Marshall, PhD, joins the Center for Bioethics faculty as Professor; and as Associate Dean for Social Medicine and Medical Humanities, and Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health in the University of Minnesota Medical School. She also serves as co-chair of the University of Minnesota Medical Center Ethics Committee.

Dr. Marshall is a past president of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities and the American Association for Bioethics. She is an elected fellow of the American College of Critical Care Medicine and a former fellow of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics. She received the Trailblazer Award from the NAACP (Charleston Chapter) in 1999 for her work in perinatal substance abuse and has testified on this subject before Congress and in US District Court.

Dr. Marshall received her undergraduate education and a PhD in religious studies (applied ethics) from the University of Virginia where she was the Paddock Graduate Fellow in Biomedical Ethics. She is a co-author of the first and second editions of Introduction to Clinical Ethics, and has published numerous reports, book chapters, and articles in the fields of clinical, research and neuro-ethics, and has written extensively on ethical issues inherent in perinatal substance abuse.

Hennepin County Medical Center and its Biomedical Ethics Committee invite you to an exciting day of presentations focusing on the development of clinical ethics in Minnesota through the eyes of those who lived through it. Ron Cranford will guide us through 33 years of progress by chronicling the experiences of professionals and families involved in some of the most visible (and not so visible) bioethics cases in American history.

Speakers include: Ronald Cranford, George Annas, Dianne Bartels, Pete Busalacchi, Arthur Caplan, Mary Faith Marshall, Steven Miles, Gay Moldow, Timothy Quill, Michael Schiavo and Jay Wolfson.

To register and for more information, visit: www.hcmc.org/education/cme or contact Robin Hoppenrath at 612-873-7128 or robin.hoppenrath@co.hennepin.mn.us.
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 second of three issues of the Bioethics Examiner highlighting key events in the Center’s twenty year history. In this issue, we highlight events from 1994–2000.

1994

- “The Role of Bioethics in Health Care Policy” and “Broadening the Bioethics Agenda” conferences are hosted by the Center in Washington, DC, in conjunction with the American Association of Bioethics (AAB) conference on “The Ethics of Health Care Reform.”
- The Allina Foundation funds a Center project to explore ethics in managed care, resource allocation and end-of-life care, “Choosing Well: Project DECIDE: Ethics in Managed Care.”
- Center hosts “Sinners, Saints, and Health Care: Individual Responsibility for Health—Ethical, Legal and Economic Questions” conference, funded by the Northwest Area Foundation.
- Dianne Bartels appointed Interim Director.

1995

- “Building Families: Ethical and Policy Issues in Adoption” conference cosponsored with the Minnesota Center for Health Care Ethics and the University of Minnesota Youth and Family Consortium.
- First Midwest Intensive Bioethics Course (collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Program in Medical Ethics, the Medical College of Wisconsin, and the University of Chicago).
- Bob Bendiksen and Dianne Bartels coordinated and taught a sociology and bioethics seminar for University of Minnesota affiliated faculty.

1996

- Center hosts monthly forums sponsored by Choosing Well/Project DECIDE. Professionals and community members from across Minnesota addressed ethical issues in end-of-life and managed care. Bibliography and reading packets were published on: ethics of managed care; advance directives; palliative care; and advance end-of-life treatment planning.
- Center hosts conferences on “End-of-Life Health Care in Managed Care Systems” and “ICU Care at the End of Life: Ethics & Practice,” in Minneapolis, funded by the Allina and Greenwall Foundations.
- Bioethics reading packet—“Baby Makers: The New Ethics of Reproduction” is produced.
- Center for Biomedical Ethics is renamed Center for Bioethics.
1997

- Carl Elliott, MD, PhD is appointed Associate Professor in the Center for Bioethics.
- Center receives a $250,000 gift to establish an endowed chair in bioethics.
- Center hosts a seminar on “The German Health Care System and Mass Murder in the Nazi Era” cosponsored with the University of Minnesota Department of History, the Jewish Studies Center, and the Department of German, Scandinavian & Dutch.
- The Bioethics Examiner, newly named newsletter, is distributed to more than 6,500 readers worldwide.
- Center is interim home to the American Association of Bioethics (AAB).
- Center faculty Dianne Bartels awarded funding for a 3-year project on “Genetics in Primary Health Care: Addressing Professional and Ethical Challenges” by the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation.
- Center hosts 1997 Midwest Intensive Bioethics Course, in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Bioethics, Medical College of Wisconsin; and the Program in Medical Ethics, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

1998

- Summit on “Implementing Minnesota’s New Health Care Directive Law” convened by the Center for Bioethics; and the Health Law Section and Elder Law Section of the Minnesota State Bar Association.
- Steven Miles, MD is listed as one of Minnesota’s Top Physicians in the area of Geriatrics by Minneapolis/ St. Paul magazine.
- Center Director, Jeffrey Kahn, launches a bi-weekly column addressing current bioethics issues on CNN’s website “Ethics Matters.”
- Susan Wolf, JD elected chair for the section on Law, Medicine, and Health Care, Association of American Law Schools.
- “An Introduction to Law, Medicine and Bioethics” a student information session is hosted by the Center for Bioethics and the Law & Medicine Society, University of Minnesota.

1999

- Center collaborates on a “New Initiative in Interdisciplinary Research and Post Baccalaureate Education,” as a partner in the creation of the Academic Health Center’s Center of Excellence in Critical Care Medicine.
- Center begins teaching an annual ethics component for the College of Biological Sciences Life Sciences Summer Undergraduate Research Program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF).
- Center Director mentors St. Olaf faculty member, Ray DeVries, PhD, on an “Ethnographic Study of Institutional Review Boards” funded by National Institutes Health (NIH).
- John Song is jointly appointed Assistant Professor in the Center for Bioethics and Department of Medicine to direct and broaden bioethics education in the University of Minnesota Medical School.
- The Joint Degree Program in Law, Health & the Life Sciences is established and headed by Susan Wolf.

2000

- Center recruits Debra DeBruin to join Center faculty as Assistant Professor and to teach ethics and public health courses through the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.
- Center faculty members Dianne Bartels and Edward Ratner are appointed to the Minnesota Commission on End-of-Life Care.
- Center faculty Carl Elliott is awarded a $460,000 NIH grant for “Ethnicity, Citizenship, Family: Identity after the Human Genome Project” (collaboration with the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and San Francisco State University).
- Center Director Jeffrey Kahn and Center faculty Susan Wolf are awarded a $450,000 NIH grant for “Genetic Testing and Disability Insurance: Ethics, Law, and Policy.”
- Susan Wolf is named Chair of the University of Minnesota’s newly established Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences. The Consortium links 17 leading centers and programs at the University to address the legal, ethical, and policy implications of the life sciences.
Recent Faculty Publications

**Book**

**Book Chapter**

**Articles**


University of Minnesota — Mini Bioethics School

**Fall 2005**

Have you always wanted to learn more about bioethics, including topics such as ethics and organ transplantation, reproductive technologies, stem cell research, and decision making at the end of life? Then Mini Bioethics School is for you! This three week course is taught by Center for Bioethics faculty and hosted by Center Director Jeffrey Kahn.

The Fall 2005 course dates are Thursdays—October 27, November 3, and November 10 from 6–7:30 p.m. on the University of Minnesota campus. Registration for the three classes is $30 and will be available on-line beginning late August. For more information, visit www.ahc.umn.edu/outreach/minimed/.
Calendar of Events

Aug 9
Ronald Cranford, MD, will speak on “Facts, Lies, and Videotapes: PVS and Terri Schiavo” at Palliative Care Grand Rounds, Fairview Health Services, Minneapolis, MN. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Aug 11
Maryam Valapour, MD, will speak on “Religion and Bioethics” at the Association for Bahá’í Studies Annual Meeting, Cambridge, MA. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Aug 24–27
Carol Tauer, PhD, will speak on “Therapy versus Enhancement in Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis” for the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Healthcare (ESPMH), European Association of Centres of Medical Ethics (EACME), and Institut Borja de Bioética, University Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Aug 28
Center for Bioethics at the Minnesota State Fair
Visit the Center for Bioethics at the Academic Health Center booth in the University of Minnesota building on Dan Patch Avenue. Bioethics faculty will discuss your answers to the bioethics game “Can you Lick the Problem?” Participants choose a bioethics question to answer, write a response and win a prize! For more information, visit our website at www.bioethics.umn.edu.

Aug 29
Carol Tauer, PhD, will speak on “Tube Feeding and Moral Decisions: Legacies of Terri Schiavo and Pope John Paul II” at Sisters of St. Joseph for Carondelet, St. Paul, MN. For information, visit www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

Sept 9
Steven Miles, MD, will participate at a Critical Care Conference Update, sponsored by the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, Minneapolis, MN. For information, email dicki002@umn.edu.

Sept 14
Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “Case Based Ethics Education Work” at the Faculty Development in Teaching Ethics Seminar at the University of South Dakota School of Medicine, Sioux Valley, SD. For information, email leidsnes@usd.edu.

Sept 14–16
Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will participate in a forum for the Transplantation Society, Vancouver, Canada. For information, visit www.transplantation-soc.org.

Sept 15
Carol Tauer, PhD, will speak on “Brave New World of Reproductive Technologies” at Carroll College, Helena, MT. For information, email bferst@carroll.edu.

Sept 20
Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will speak on “Better Than Well: Enhancement Technologies and the Pursuit of Happiness” at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. For information, email dbenatar@humanities.uct.ac.za.

Sept 21
Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will speak on “Bioethics Challenges for Medicine and Pharma” at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. For information, email terryfei@hotmail.com.

Sept 28
Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will speak on “Ethics of Allocation of Nondirected Kidneys” at the University of Minnesota’s Transplant Immunosuppression Conference 2005. For information, visit www.cme.umn.edu.

Sept 29
Carol Tauer, PhD, will speak on “Tube Feeding and Moral Decisions: Legacies of Terri Schiavo and Pope John Paul II” at Sisters of St. Joseph for Carondelet, St. Paul, MN. For information, visit www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

Sept 30

Oct 9
Maryam Valapour, MD, will speak on “Ethics of the Use of Psychosocial Criteria as Contraindication for Transplantation.” For information, visit www.ashb.org.

Oct 13
Dianne Bartels, RN, MA, PhD, will speak on “Ethics of Stem Cell Research” at the National Society for Genetic Counselors’ Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA. For information, call 612-624-9440.

Oct 23
Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will participate in a panel discussion “Money and Drugs” at the Canadian Bioethics Society, Halifax, Nova Scotia. For information, visit www.bioethics.ca/index-ang.html.

Oct 24–26
The Woodside Center for Interdisciplinary Studies conference “Social Consequences of the New Biology” in Grand Forks, ND. On 10/25 Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH, will speak on “Little Cells, Big Issues: The Ethics and Policy Debate Around Embryonic Stem Cell Research”; and Steven Miles, MD, will speak on “End of Life Care: Heroic Expectations and Real-Life Practices.” On 10/26 Carl Elliott, MD, PhD, will speak on “Is That a Bioethicist in Your Pocket?” For information, email woodside1@gvtel.com.
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Candace Holmbo, Managing Editor

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The Center for Bioethics Resource Center is pleased to announce our newest website feature Law and Bioethics. This new online resource offers an introduction to the field of law as it affects, and is affected by, bioethics. This site includes explanations of the legal system, examples of statutory laws and court decisions affecting bioethics, a discussion of ethical issues that arise at the intersection of law and bioethics, and links and further resources for those that want to learn more. To check out the new feature, go to the Resource Center webpage and click on Law and Bioethics or go directly to www.bioethics.umn.edu/resources/law.shtml.

The Center gratefully acknowledges the Starr Foundation in supporting this effort.