## AAASNEWSAAASNE

## Death and Dying Policy: A Bold Exchange

It appears to be an impossible subject, one that demands bold definitions and assumptions that bypass age-old beliefs.

It is a subject that AAAS and the Georgetown University Health Policy Center confronted in convening a seminar entitled "Death and Dying: An Investigation of Legislative and Policy Issues," 30 June in Washington, D.C.

Organized as one of the AAAS regional seminar series, the program integrated a range of viewpoints on death and dying, as a panel including a lawyer, a physician, a moral ethicist, and a demographer directed their knowledge and experience toward a common question: What role can, or should, public policy take in the controversies surrounding death and dying?

Four speakers made up the morning segment of the program: Conrad Taeuber, director of the Center for Population Research of the Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics; Sidney Rosoff, attorney and president of the Society for the Right to Die; Robert Veatch, director of the Research Group on Death and Dying of the Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences; and Andre Hellegers, director of the Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics.

Perhaps the clearest point to emerge from this rare multidisciplinary exchange—and it is an ironic one—was that there is no common question to tackle where death and dying controversies are concerned. There is the question of a policy definition of death that is separate from the question of when life maintenance systems should be cut off; and there is the question of active versus passive euthanasia, along with countless problems involving physician responsibility, insurance, the rights of the fetus, and so on.

A striking expression of the subtlety of death and dying policy issues came in Taeuber's paper, entitled "If Nobody

Died of Cancer . . . . "It appeared to be a report on mortality trends by disease, until Taeuber asked: What might be the consequence of eliminating one or another of the major killers of the present time? His answer, given in statistical terms, is that people would die of other diseases. Given the alternative mortality causes, Taeuber suggested that "on balance, it appears that total health costs would not be decreased simply by the elimination of cancer."

In the brief question-answer period that followed each of the paper presentations, the audience of 75 medical and health professionals, clergy, educators, and media reporters seemed puzzled. It was as if the listeners were unwilling to

face the question Taeuber was asking: Is there a possibility that public policy on disease research is channeling efforts to save our lives in the wrong direction? Later in the morning Hellegers, offering commentary on each of the panel's papers, admonished: "Nitpickers will question the decimal points, but the basic question is unavoidable . . . . Should health policy consist of fostering the good birth, the good life, and the good death, or should it be a policy of all possible death prevention . . .?"

Public policy implications were more difficult to overlook in the next paper presented. The speaker was Sidney Rosoff, and his question to the audience was direct and familiar. "Granting... that the patient cannot be considered dead under any common law or legislative standard, does that patient have the right to direct that his treatment be terminated under certain facts and circumstances?" He explained the "living will," a document developed by the

## Membership Nomination Drive Set for '76

Following 1975's highly successful Membership Nomination Drive, active participation of the AAAS community will again be enlisted for the 1976 campaign.

Last year's effort, in which members were asked to submit names of colleagues who might be interested in joining the Association, gained nearly 2000 new members and proved to be the year's single most effective recruitment endeavor.

The quality, size, and diversity of AAAS membership has been a constant factor in maintaining the Association's status as a preeminent advocate of progress in science, both as the source of expertise contributed to its projects and as a base of financial support. But as AAAS has sought to respond to growing needs with new initiatives, our total membership has been slowly declining. Reversal of this trend is essential. While AAAS is reshaping its recruitment methods, it needs help from all of its members.

AAAS members will shortly receive letters and forms on which to nominate prospective new members. Each nominee will then be contacted, with reference made to the nominator, and will be invited to become a member of AAAS. If each member sends in just four nominees and these nominees respond as favorably as they have in the past, AAAS will grow substantially this year. However, members are encouraged to send in as many names as possible.

Meanwhile, AAAS continues to explore additional benefits for old and new members. For the first time this year, members will enjoy a preferential registration charge for the annual meeting; and benefit programs in insurance and travel are being investigated.

Questions, comments, and suggestions regarding the 1976 Membership Nomination Drive may be directed to the Membership Recruitment Office at AAAS headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Euthanasia Education Council that is not legally enforceable, but which affirms a person's desire to dictate at what point in an illness life maintenance efforts should cease. Rosoff's paper included a brief review of legislative activity on "death with dignity" among the states, the implications of "right to die" legislation for

physicians, and the prospective for legislative versus judicial authorization of public policy.

Perhaps the most complex facets of death and dying policy issues were broached in Veatch's paper, "Criteria for Determination of Death: An Evaluation." It was his assignment to review definitions of death and the difficulties implied in the task of standardizing policy for such definitions. Reviewing traditional touchstones-irreversible loss of flow of vital body fluids, the soul from the body, the capacity for bodily integration, and consciousness—Veatch made the point, finally, that although technology may be able to determine when a person's heart, lungs, or brain has stopped functioning, to identify any of these conditions in a human being is not to identify death. The problem remains of settling on a single definition of what death is and, from Veatch's point of view, technology cannot make the decision for us.

Other facets of the issue discussed by Veatch were the influence of new transplantation technology on death and dying policy, the application of definitions of death to the fetus, and the possible complications imposed thereby on the abortion issue.

Andre Hellegers closed the morning session of the program by commenting on each of the three preceding papers. He underscored the complexity of the "definition of death" versus the "right to die" problems by restating Veatch's contention that it is a philosophical dilemma; took a cautionary stand on "living wills," predicting unforeseen effects on family involvement and medical insurance costs; and called Taeuber's paper the most relevant of the three, in that it exposed the fact that public policy has the potential to dictate how we die as well as how we live.

Hellegers' closing words reflected both the complexity of integrating knowledge and opinion toward policy formulation and the need for more exposure of facts of the kind discussed during the AAAS/Georgetown University Health Policy Center seminar. "It suffices, today, for this one conference, to bring these facts to light, for ultimately decisions by the body politic are our decisions and we should be acting out of a lack of humaneness if we acted out of ignorance."

All seminar registrants were given the opportunity to informally discuss each of the four papers and to formulate recommendations for policy-makers during afternoon workshop sessions. The Georgetown University Health Policy Center, from whose research and analysis activity the seminar idea emerged, will compile the proceedings, including recommendations of the conference, and AAAS will publish the report in the late fall.

Nancy Cahill Joyce Public Information Office

## Congressional Science Fellows: Do They Make a Difference?

What difference does the Congressional Science and Engineering Fellow Program make? Guyford Stever, President Ford's choice to head the new White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, provided an interesting perspective on that question during testimony he gave in July before the Select Committee to Study the Senate Committee System.

Dr. Stever noted that changes have taken place in the Congress in recent years which enhance the ability of Congress to set the direction of the national science effort. Among these changes he cited four: establishment of the Office of Technology Assessment, implementation of the Budget Control and Impoundment Act, strengthening of the Congressional Research Service and the General Accounting Office, and initiation of Congressional Science Fellowships, such as the program developed by AAAS.

His remarks included the observation, "An increased number of scientifically and technically trained staff on congressional committees has given the committee hearing process itself the ability to probe more deeply into key science and technology issues. I believe that the programs of Congressional Fellowships that the scientific community has established have provided a reservoir of highly talented newcomers who have contributed greatly to the ability of Congress to deal with science and technology matters. Surely they've helped in designing many tough questions for agency heads like myself to answer."



Photo by Marvin Ickow

The 1976-77 Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows, including four sponsored by AAAS, participated in an intensive orientation program arranged by the Association, 7 to 17 September. They are, left to right: Kirby Holte (sponsored by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), Lloyd Faulkner (Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology), Gary A. Ritchie (AAAS), Sara C. Schurr (American Psychological Association), Ronald Bruno (American Physical Society), George L. Jacobson (AAAS), Frank Hurley (American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics), Granville J. Smith (American Physical Society), E. William Colglazier, Jr. (AAAS), Michael D. Crisp (Optical Society of America), and Robert Darryl Banks (AAAS).

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