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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

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.