



News Release

Medical futility focus of *Practical Bioethics* *Ethical issue for clinicians and patients*

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The scenario is far too common in today's medical facilities. An elderly woman is moved from a skilled nursing facility to a local hospital because of multiorgan failure. The family is at the bedside demanding all possible medical means to save her life. Physicians and other caregivers are convinced such treatment would be medically futile.

The new issue of *Practical Bioethics*, the quarterly publication of the Center for Practical Bioethics, examines the issue of medical futility and raises questions about the rights and responsibilities of patients, families and medical professionals.

"As a society, we need to take a hard look at our perceptions and expectations of modern medicine and, ultimately, at what ought to be the proper goals of medicine and healthcare," says Michael Brannigan, PhD, vice president of clinical and organizational ethics at the Center. "Throughout the process, we need to reassure patients and their families that they will continue to receive comfort and care."

James J. Walker, PhD, professor of bioethics at Loyola Marymount University, says bioethicists frequently hear the phrase "if we have medical technology, we ought to use it."

"This facile move from a factual statement to a moral ought sends chills up the spines of many who study these issues," Dr. Walker says in the publication's lead article. "The principal goal of any proposed medical intervention ought to be to produce a medical benefit for the patient."

Edmund Pellegrino, MD, the chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, suggests in an article entitled "Decisions at the End of Life" that care is never futile. "It must be provided throughout the whole life of the patient," Dr. Pellegrino says. "Comfort, relief of pain and suffering, and attention to personal needs are all morally mandatory, until the moment of death."

A copy of the publication can be accessed at the Center's website at www.practicalbioethics.org.

Founded in 1984, the Center for Practical Bioethics is an independent organization nationally recognized for its work in practical bioethics. More than a think tank, the Center puts theory into action to help people and organizations find real-world solutions to complex issues in health and healthcare.