

can grow to be so big and tall that the stars will twinkle from my branches!" And the apple tree was assured by the wind which rushed through her branches that her prayer would be answered.

Years passed and the apple tree grew, but so did the oak trees which surrounded her. And each year on those crystal clear evenings when the stars shone so brightly, the apple tree would yearn as she

Maimonides identified more strongly with his patients than did Hippocrates and recognized the need to establish a more caring relationship.

looked up to see the stars glittering through the branches of the oak trees which surrounded her.

The apple tree could take it no longer. She cried out, "When will the day come when I can have stars in my branches?"

Suddenly the clouds rolled in. The sky became full of wind and rain. The wind blew strong and hard. The rain beat down upon the tree. The full branches of the apple tree shook with such force that many red apples tumbled to the ground and split open. As the apple tree looked down the voice of the Divine answered: "Oh foolish tree! Why must you look outside for stars? All you need is to look within. You will find a star at your heart . . . within each of your fruit. Your brilliance is inside . . . all you need is to know it is there."

How many of us have failed to discover the beauty, the peace in our own selves? How many of us look for the strength to cope with difficult and sensitive issues solely by searching all around? Let us learn the lesson taught to the apple tree. We have the strength and nourishment and "stars" within ourselves to resolve the challenges placed before us. May we take the time to look inside and find them. In this process of self-discovery, we touch our own sparks of the divine.

Once we have discovered the stars within, may we use them to brighten our inner selves and the world around us which so desperately needs our light.

How Religious Values Affect Medical Care Decisions of Jehovah's Witnesses

by Cyrus DeWolf

Jehovah's Witnesses accept the Bible as God's Word, a sure guide in all areas of life. They are trained to use biblical laws and principles to make decisions, recognizing that obedience to God is necessary for His granting the gift of everlasting life. A scriptural view of life, death and the future of the earth leads Witnesses to value life and seek medical care. For religious reasons they refuse blood transfusions, but alternative treatment is available and effective. When there is a question about non-blood therapy, Hospital Liaison Committee members are available to assist Jehovah's Witnesses and medical personnel in finding appropriate treatment.

Health care professionals may feel challenged when a patient, because of his or her religious values, refuses some commonly accepted medical procedure. When a patient makes a steadfast decision

based on religious conviction, physicians and nurses may wonder about the proper response. Some believe that a patient can be influenced to change his position by applying sincere and determined pressure. But is this the proper way to handle patients, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, who have strong religious values?

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This article will examine the source of Jehovah's Witnesses' religious values and how they affect medical care decisions. Most people know that Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions, but they may not understand the reasons why. The religious values that lead Witnesses to refuse blood in therapy also affect their thinking about health care generally. Because many people are not familiar with this position, and because Witnesses take stances that, in the view of some, go contrary to "common sense," we will explore why Jehovah's Witnesses believe that their religious values do not pose a serious threat to receiving quality medical care.

Faith-healing is not practiced by Jehovah's Witnesses, nor do they expect miraculous cures simply because they adhere to religious values when they seek health care. They search out the best health care available. Yet many medical profession-

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that their religious values do not pose a serious threat to receiving quality medical care.

als believe that refusal to accept blood or blood products is a failure to value life and results in an unacceptably low standard of treatment. Neither of these views is true. It is because Jehovah's Witnesses value life that they want to live by their religious values, and non-blood management of health problems does not deprive them of sound medical care.

Some medical people are convinced that if they cannot use blood in treating a patient their hands are tied and the patient will surely die. Time and time again experience has shown this is simply not true. Quick and skillful use of proven alternatives has been very successful. The document published by Jehovah's Witnesses entitled *Strategies for Avoiding and Controlling Hemorrhage and Anemia Without Blood Transfusion* lists eighteen established techniques for controlling internal and external bleeding; twelve operative and anesthetic techniques to limit blood loss during surgery; seven alternative blood volume expanders; thirteen hemostatic agents for bleeding/clotting problems; and thirteen therapeutic agents for managing anemia. (Copies of this document are available through the local Hospital Liaison Committee of Jehovah's Witness.)

Use of these techniques, instead of blood therapy, in treating disease and trauma among Jehovah's Witnesses has not exposed them to a lower standard of care. It has, however, eliminated the recognized risks of transfusion practice. A short quote from *Circulation* ("Congenital Heart Disease: Total Bloodless Open Heart Surgery in the Pediatric Age Group," September 1984) serves to illustrate this. "Forty-eight pediatric open heart surgical procedures were performed with bloodless techniques regardless of surgical complexity. Because of consistent success in Jehovah's Witnesses and the fact that blood transfusion carries a risk of serious complications, we are currently performing most of our pediatric cardiac operations without transfusion."

Around the world there are nearly four and one-half million Jehovah's Witnesses. Most were once members of another religion. Why are they not confused about the role of religion in their lives? How can they achieve moral consensus worldwide? It is because Jehovah's Witnesses believe their doctrines are based on the Bible and thus have their source in God's thoughts.

Most of those who now are Witnesses were first contacted through the public ministry which is the hallmark of Jehovah's Witnesses, as it was of Jesus and the first Christians. They have been trained over many months, sometimes years, in a personalized home Bible study. Congregational meetings also emphasize applying the Bible to decision making and Christian living. The student examines the fundamental truths of the Bible, the principles (settled guidelines for conduct) based on these truths, and the laws of God with the goal of learning how to obey these laws and exercise good judgment when there is no set law on a matter, guiding one's life by biblical principles.

An example that relates to health care can illustrate this. In Acts 4:24 a fundamental truth is stated: "Sovereign Lord, you are the one who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them." Since God made them, God is the Owner of all things and the Source of all authority and power. From this fundamental truth we can establish a settled guideline for conduct: We owe God full obedience in everything. In Jeremiah 7:23 God said: "Obey my voice, and I will become your God, and you yourselves will become my people, and you must walk in all the ways that I shall command you, in order that it may go well with you." It was required to "walk in all" that God commanded.

More specifically, Genesis 9:4 tells us "Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat." That this was more than just a temporary dietary rule is seen from God's next statement: "And besides that,

your blood of your souls shall I ask back. From the hand of every living creature shall I ask it back." This text, plus a passage from Acts 15:29 which requires Christians to "abstain from blood," supports the Jehovah's Witness understanding that God views blood as sacred. In trying to live obediently to God, Witnesses today abstain from misuse of blood in any way, including its use in medical practice.

Jehovah's Witnesses are united in their approach to the Bible because they accept it as God's truth and do not resort to philosophical arguments to evade its clear statements or to justify the lifestyles of people who have abandoned its moral standards. In pointing out the meaning of symbolic language, they let the Bible provide its own explanation instead of giving their theories as to its significance.

Jehovah's Witnesses take seriously the need to do as Romans 12:2 says, "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

It is because Jehovah's Witnesses value life that they want to live by their religious values.

This process of transforming the mind through Bible study is the same in all lands and cultures of the world. In villages and towns and the largest cities, under every form of government, social structure and medical care system, Jehovah's Witnesses are taught how God's values, as set out in the Bible, can affect their lives. By this study the Witnesses understand that the purpose of life is to learn about God and do His will, as Ecclesiastes 12:13 says: "The conclusion of the matter, everything having been heard, is: Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man."

Doing God's will includes developing a godly personality. So it is necessary to identify the behaviors God hates—such as lying, theft, harmful gossip, uncontrolled anger—and reject them. It is also necessary to study the qualities God seeks—such as love, joy, peace, kindness, and goodness—and cultivate these with the help of Jehovah's holy spirit (Gal. 5:19-22). If people are to gain eternal life they need to be the kind of people He will want to have around for eternity. Indeed, learning about God and

doing His will give purpose and meaning to human life as nothing else can.

As love for God, Jesus and other people grows stronger, those who wish to become Witnesses find their ideas and actions changing. Out of a personal relationship with Jehovah, one makes a reasoned, well-thought-out commitment to direct life course decisions according to biblical laws and principles, not by personal desires, emotional feelings or secular philosophy. If it is determined that a person understands and accepts what the Bible says, and is living in harmony with it, he or she is qualified to be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness.

It is important that each Witness uses his or her Bible-trained conscience to make value judgments and does not merely follow the dictates of a creed. In making medical decisions the individual demonstrates faith in God by applying what he learns from the Bible. This reflection goes on throughout life and deals with a wide range of health issues: Why smoking tobacco goes against biblical principles; How one can find health and happiness; Caring for the aged; How we should care for the terminally ill; Saving life with non-blood therapies; How to cope as a hospital patient; Who should provide sex education; Help for alcoholics and their families; How we can end the worldwide AIDS epidemic. Life is valuable to Jehovah's Witnesses, and good health enables them to have a full share in their ministry work. Therefore when accident or ill health hinders them they will seek the best medical treatment available and will want to be involved in health care decisions.

Because of biblical law, some decisions are firmly made long before the need arises. For instance, refusal to have a blood transfusion flows from the conviction that God's word is reasonable and beneficial when it forbids certain actions. For this reason Witnesses carry with them an *Advance Medical Directive/Release Document* making clear their wishes should they be in an accident and rendered unconscious. (A sample directive is printed following this article.) Other forbidden actions, such as abortion, premarital and extramarital sex, or therapies using major blood components, are now widely accepted in society, but this does not alter the clear requirements of the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses will stick to their decisions on these matters as non-negotiable without trying to accommodate popular views.

According to the Bible, parents have the responsibility to make decisions for their children, including choices of medical therapy. The booklet *How Can Blood Save Your Life?* says, "Naturally, all parents make decisions affecting their children's safety and life: Will the family use gas or oil to heat the

home? Will they take a child on a long distance drive? May he go swimming? Such matters involve risks, even life-and-death ones. But society recognizes parental discretion, so parents are granted the

Learning about God and doing God's will give meaning to human life as nothing else can.

major voice in nearly all decisions affecting their children" (21). Health care decisions for children affect their future because many therapies carry substantial risk to the quality (or even length) of life. All such decisions will be made in light of the parents' religious values, recognizing that both parents and children are subject to God. However, decisions which involve obedience to God's laws will already have been made and are non-negotiable.

Let us turn from obedience to specific laws to how the religious values of Jehovah's Witnesses affect other health care decisions. The Bible is not a book about medical treatment, thus Jehovah's Witnesses do not endorse or recommend specific therapies. Each individual must take responsibility for evaluating what he will or will not accept as appropriate treatment. Here are several biblical principles Witnesses might apply which will make an impact on prevention and recovery from health problems:

1. "Let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God's fear" (2 Cor. 7:1). A clean body and mind are healthful.
2. "Bodily training is beneficial for a little, but godly devotion is beneficial for all things, as it holds promise of the life now and that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Physical exercise in moderation is beneficial.
3. "Do not forget the doing of good and the sharing of things with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Not only is God pleased but there is mounting evidence that these actions promote good health.
4. "A calm heart is the life of the fleshly organism, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones" (Prov. 14:30). "Let all malicious bitterness and anger and wrath and screaming and abusive speech be taken away from you along with all badness" (Ephes. 4:31). Our emotional

health has a direct effect on our physical health.

For Jehovah's Witnesses there are several factors relevant to appropriate decision making. *Awake!* magazine (March 8, 1991, 4) states, "Whether there is one opinion or two or more, a wise patient takes time to determine for himself the need for and wisdom of the proposed treatment." Taking time to look into the Bible, assessing the recommended therapy and praying about how each choice might affect one's relationship with God and other people, the Witness considers the situation in light of his or her religious values.

Watchtower (June 15, 1982, 25) reminds readers of the Bible's counsel on being reasonable with respect to health matters. It says, "'Let your reasonableness become known to all men' (Phil. 4:5). We need reasonableness when it comes to our health. For example, we need to avoid overindulgence or extremes in what we eat, and we should get adequate exercise and rest. Our attitudes toward treatments should likewise be based on reason, reflecting care that we do not get caught up emotionally in some health fad. Reasonableness is also needed in balancing our spiritual health and our physical health; we need to 'make sure of the more important things' (Phil. 1:10) so that health concerns do not push God's Kingdom into second place."

In following this approach to medical decision making, a Witness exercises his trained conscience. "In addition to looking for outright laws, we ought to be interested in whether there are any biblical principles related to it. In situations where a personal decision must be made, sincere Christians ought to follow a course that will leave them with a clean and untroubled conscience before God. How much a Christian loves Jehovah and his principles may be displayed in what he decides on questions of conscience" (*Watchtower*, July 15, 1982, 23).

One area where individual conscience must spring into action involves therapy using blood fractions such as immune globulins or albumin. Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept transfusions of whole blood or its primary components; however, on the question of whether to accept a blood fraction, *Watchtower* (June 1, 1990, 30) says, "In view of the command to 'abstain from blood,' some Christians have felt that they should not accept an immune globulin (protein) injection, even though it was only a blood fraction. Their stand is clear and simple—no blood component in any form or amount. Others have felt that a serum (antitoxin), such as immune globulin, containing only a tiny fraction of a donor's blood plasma and used to bolster their defense against disease, is not the same as

a life-sustaining blood transfusion. So their consciences may not forbid them to take immune globulin or similar fractions. . . . It is significant that the blood system of a pregnant woman is separate from that of the fetus in her womb; their blood types are often different. The mother does not pass her blood into the fetus. . . . However, some substances from the plasma cross into the fetus' circulation. . . . That some protein fractions from the plasma do move naturally into the blood system of one individual (the fetus) may be another consideration when a Christian is deciding whether he will accept immune globulin, albumin, or similar injections of plasma fraction. One person may feel that he in good conscience can; another may conclude

Reasonableness is needed in balancing our spiritual health and our physical health.

that he cannot. Each must resolve the matter personally before God."

It is similar when considering autologous transfusion. Any use of stored blood is not in harmony with God's law, for Deuteronomy 12:24 says of blood that is no longer part of the person: "You should pour it out upon the ground as water." In commenting about the varied techniques of autologous blood use that do not involve stored blood, *Watchtower* (March 1, 1989, 31) says:

There is a growing variety of equipment or techniques involving autologous blood. We cannot and should not try to comment on each variation. When faced with a question in this area, each Christian is responsible to obtain details from medical personnel and then make a personal decision. Though much has been said here about medical aspects, what is of greatest importance are the religious issues. As a Christian resolves any doubts or questions about medical processes involving blood, what should predominate should be that he displays faith, that he respects God's command to 'abstain from blood,' and that he maintains a good conscience. . . . While modern medicine might be able to help us extend our lives for a time, we certainly would not want to extend our present life by doing anything that would violate our Christian conscience or would displease our Life-Giver.

Since each Jehovah's Witness strives to live by religious values, how will personal faith affect patient/caregiver interaction? Witnesses seek out medical care and want the best available, hence the relationship between patient and doctor is important. The patient depends on the doctor's skill and knowledge, looking to him or her for help and counsel on options and risks. The patient needs to be well-informed so he can choose wisely, approving or refusing various treatments. Because the Witness makes judgments according to faith, the health professional must be sensitive to his or her specific needs.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* (246:21, November 27, 1981, 2472) says:

Rather than consider the Witness patient a problem, more and more physicians accept the situation as a medical challenge. In meeting the challenge they have developed a standard of practice for this group of patients that is accepted at numerous medical centers around the country. These physicians are at the same time providing care that is the best for the patient's total good. As Gardner, et. al. observe: "Who would benefit if the patient's corporal malady is cured but the spiritual life with God, as he sees it, is compromised, which leads to a life that is meaningless and perhaps worse than death itself."

Many doctors and nurses recognize the importance of treating the whole person. To do this for Jehovah's Witnesses it is necessary to respect the position of their faith as central to their lives. They expect to live according to it, now and in the future. Some hospitals have developed a protocol to follow when treating Witness patients. (See the sample following this article.) Since it seems that most problems occur during an emergency or on holidays when regular staff is not on duty, the availability of this protocol helps to relieve the pressure of a difficult situation.

Another resource is the local Hospital Liaison Committee of Jehovah's Witnesses. The five people on this committee receive special training and are available to educate hospital administrators and staff about Jehovah's Witnesses and their views about blood transfusions and other health matters. As requested by patients, they will come to the hospital when there are questions about a particular case or a confrontation has occurred. The goal is to defuse the situation, avoid conflict and provide information on acceptable non-blood management of the patient's condition. If a court order is sought to circumvent the patient's wishes, the Committee will assist the patient or the patient's attorney during a

legal proceeding. In addition, the Committee maintains a list of local doctors who will treat Witnesses without therapies that violate their conscience.

Jehovah's Witnesses seek the best medical care, hence the relationship between patient and doctor is important.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that every area of life should be guided by their religious values. Health care decisions must not violate biblical teachings or individual conscience. Perfect health is impossible in the present system; such health will not be possible until Jehovah brings about the promised new earthly system when "No resident will say: 'I am sick.'" (Is. 33:24). Jehovah's Witnesses desire to serve faithfully the One who can bring this about.

**Medical Emergencies
What To Ask**

1. What are the basic symptoms and dangers of the disease or problem?
2. Is the proposed treatment essential medical care or experimental? Would a second, independent opinion be beneficial?
3. What are the risks associated with the doctor's proposed treatment, including the risks of giving a blood transfusion?
4. What alternatives to giving blood has the doctor explored? Why does the doctor feel a blood transfusion is necessary in this case? (Knowing this will help focus on the alternatives that have proved effective.)
5. Is the doctor willing to consult the medical literature on non-blood treatment?
6. Is the doctor willing to consult with other doctors who have successfully treated Jehovah's Witnesses without the use of blood?
7. Is the doctor willing to yield to another medical team who will take over medical care of the patient?

Advance Medical Directive/Release

I, _____, make this advance directive as a formal statement of my wishes. These instructions reflect my resolute decision.

I direct that *no blood transfusions* (whole blood, red cells, white cells, platelets, or blood plasma) be given to me under any circumstances, even if physicians deem such necessary to preserve my life or health. I will accept nonblood volume expanders (such as dextran, saline or Ringer's solution, or hetastarch) and other nonblood management.

This legal directive is an exercise of my right to accept or to refuse medical treatment in accord with my deeply held values and convictions. I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and I make this directive out of obedience to commands in the Bible, such as: "Keep abstaining . . . from blood." (Acts 15:28, 29) This is, and has been, my unwavering religious stand for _____ years. I am _____ years old.

I also know that there are various dangers associated with blood transfusions. So I have decided to avoid such dangers and, instead, to accept whatever risks may seem to be involved in my choice of alternative nonblood management.

I release physicians, anesthesiologists, and hospitals and their personnel from liability for any damages that might be caused by my refusal of blood, despite their otherwise competent care.

I authorize the person(s) named on the reverse to see that my instructions set forth in this directive are upheld and to answer any questions about my absolute refusal of blood.

Signature _____
 Address _____ Date _____
 _____ Telephone _____
 Witness _____
 Witness _____

(Reverse Side)

As parents we are deeply interested in the welfare of our child _____.

Because of our family's convictions as Jehovah's Witnesses we do not accept blood transfusions. We do accept non-blood expanders and other medical treatment. In case of accident, please contact us immediately. We likely can provide information as to physicians who respect our religious convictions and may already have provided medical care for us.

Signature _____ Date _____

 Signature _____ Date _____

**Hospital Protocol for Treating
Jehovah's Witnesses**

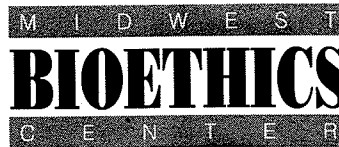
REVIEW non-blood medical alternatives and treat the patient without using homologous blood.

CONSULT with other doctors experienced in nonblood alternative management at same facility and treat without using homologous blood.

CONTACT local Hospital Liaison Committee of Jehovah's Witnesses in locating experienced and cooperative doctors at other facilities to consult on alternative care.

TRANSFER patient, if necessary, to cooperative doctor or facility before patient's condition deteriorates.

IN A RARE SITUATION, if court advice is deemed necessary, the patient, the parents or the conservator should be notified as soon as possible of such intended action. This will allow for due process of law and for the court to hear both sides so as to weigh all factors in reaching a decision, including alternative medical nonblood management of the case.



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- Contributing Members \$250-499
- Center Benefactors \$500-999
- Center Patrons \$1000-4999
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- Sustaining Members \$5000 & more
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Home Phone # _____

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