Christian Concerns in Medical Ethics

Forty persons representing the nursing, pastoral care, and educational professions as well as the general public recently participated in a Workshop on Christian Approaches to the Ethical and Pastoral Problems of Living and Dying at Spalding College in Louisville, Kentucky. The participants formulated a platform of ten ethical concerns which they see as a program for persons who are sensitive to the ethical dimensions in health care.

The ten concerns are divided into two groups, three of general significance and seven of more specific import. The three general concerns are: (1) personalizing health care, the practice of holistic medicine, medicine as an interpersonal covenant between patient and health professional; (2) improved moral education for health professionals and the general public; (3) the preservation of justice and rights in the provision of health care.

The seven more specific concerns are: (1) encouragement of continued genetic research and the study of its morally acceptable uses; (2) the institution and support of hospice programs for the terminally ill; (3) encouraging the honest recognition of death and the willingness to face it, especially among health care professionals; (4) protecting the right of health professionals who refuse to participate in procedures they find morally unacceptable; (5) promoting concern for the unborn; (6) educating couples in natural family planning; (7) careful study of legislation involving living wills to see whether it is necessary and what its long-range impact might be.

Meetings like the one at Spalding College are important and should be encouraged. They serve to increase the awareness of moral issues in the field of health care and to foster communication between groups who might not otherwise be talking with one another.