



Center for Health Ethics
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Ethical Issues: Tribute to Edmund D. Pellegrino, M.D.

This week we will be visited by a person of iconic stature, and who is an elder statesman in the field of medicine and ethics. Edmund Pellegrino's influence has spanned over 60 years of service. His insight and ability to articulate the importance of beneficence and trust through the healing relationship have continued to provide a grounding force to sustain health care as a patient-centered enterprise in spite of the modern influences of expanding technology, the competing market, politics, and the ever pressing press of academic health care institutions to drift from their primary mission of patient care. Dr. Pellegrino man has individually mentored many, personally served thousands, and ultimately influenced the welfare of millions during his many years as a physician and ethicist. Personally, Dr. Pellegrino's contributions and mentoring have left an indelible mark, for which I am eternally grateful.

Edmund Pellegrino, M.D. is presently professor emeritus of medicine and medical ethics at Georgetown University, prior to which he served as the director of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, the Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics, and the Center for Clinical Bioethics—all at Georgetown. He served as president of Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. from 1978-1982, is former dean of the school of medicine at the State University of New York, and was a former chairman of the Department of Medicine at the University of Kentucky. He has published over 550 peer reviewed papers, authored or co authored 24 books, and continues to write prodigiously. His desk remains piled with assorted stacks of manuscripts, correspondence, and partially prepared presentations. And, though the latest word processing technology is at hand, one can typically know when he is in his office each morning (typically by 6:30 AM) by the "tick-ticking" of his trusty mechanical Olivetti typewriter that he has traveled with and used for over 50 years of scholarly productivity.

Recently Dr. Pellegrino was appointed to a three year term (2004-2007) on the International Bioethics Committee of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This committee, established in 1993, is the only advisory body within the United Nations system to engage in reflection on the ethical implications of advances in life sciences. Quite recently the White House announced that as of October 1, 2005, Dr. Pellegrino would assume the chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, which was formed by President Bush in 2001. By assuming the chair he replaces another renowned ethicist, Leon Kass, of Chicago University. The President's Council has given in depth attention to the issue of stem cell research and human cloning over the past three years, but other issues of major concern that may now

be deliberated are physician-assisted suicide, end of life issues, aging, disparities, and health care access.

Earlier this year Dr. Pellegrino graciously accepted an appointment as adjunct professor of medicine and ethics with the MU Center for Health Ethics, and we are delighted to have him as one of our faculty. He will be here this week visiting the Center and to present the first annual *Pellegrino Lecture*, named in his honor, the evening of October 27; his talk is entitled, Organization and the Patient: Ethical Issues in “Organized Care”. The following day he will also be a key note speaker at the MU Health Ethics Conference, focusing on the form and function of clinical ethics within health care organizations.

Edmund Pellegrino’s impact on medicine and his role in the development of bioethics as a discipline has been immense. In many ways he has been instrumental in the development of bioethics as the rigorous discipline of deliberation about moral issues in medicine and society as we know it today. This week, as we observe him in action and experience his mentoring, in many ways we will be observing and living bioethics within its historical context. We are blessed by his presence and commitment to our institution, and we will forever benefit by his having passed our way.