

## World and Nation

# Medical technology outpacing ethics

By STACI COX  
Assistant Managing Editor

The definition of death and the right to die are increasingly complicated by medical technology, and a recent resolution by the N.C. Medical Society regarding "death with dignity" exemplifies the difficulties physicians, families and the legal system now face.

"The lines used to be clear; either a man was dead or he was not," said Jim Shields, executive director of the N.C. division of the American Civil Liberties Union. "Now that modern medicine is so sophisticated, it's a question of nuances, of whether an artificially supported heartbeat is human without an active brain."

Modern technology often puts physicians in a position that a patient can only exist in a persistent vegetative state with the help of artificial life-support which the family wants ended, said Penny Hodgson, communications director for the N.C. Medical Society.

"It's a question of ethics," Hodgson said. "It may be easier when the patient has made his wishes known, especially with a living will, but sometimes there has been no communication and the family wants everything possible done to keep Daddy alive. Then the physi-

cian doesn't have a leg to stand on."

Living wills serve as excellent records of a patient's desires and relieve the strain of making such a decision from the family, but they are not legal documents and are not binding, said Kenneth Wing, UNC professor of Health Policy and Administration and associate professor of law. If a patient changes his mind, a verbal statement overrides the living will and the document is not valid if it violates local, state or federal laws.

The N.C. Right to Natural Death Act gives physicians the right to remove extraordinary means from the care of a patient in a persistent vegetative state but does not define extraordinary means. The Medical Society resolution, which is not a law, includes intravenous food and water as part of extraordinary means but does not require physicians to act one way or the other.

"We're just saying it's ethical," Hodgson said. "We had so many physicians calling us and asking what the policy is on this that we had to create some tangible definitions."

But the resolution only codifies Medical Society policy and might not stand up to strict legal scrutiny, Wing said.

"It's a complicated issue that I would take six weeks of class to explain," Wing said. "But in my view, any competent person should be able to refuse extraordinary treatment."

There are now 50 cases involving right to die in 16 court districts nationwide, and there is an important case before the Supreme Court during this term, he said. Almost every case that has been decided thus far has favored the patient's right to die, but the Medical Society is awaiting the Supreme Court decision before testing its resolution, Hodgson said.

In the case facing the Supreme Court, Cruzan vs. Harmon, the parents of Nancy Cruzan, a 31-year-old who has been kept alive artificially since a severe car accident seven years ago, are suing the state of Missouri to allow them to disconnect her life support. The state is taking the stance that its interest in protecting human life overrides her right to die.

"They're taking a radical view that severely restricts a person's right to make decisions about their own body," Shields said. "It's really just a short step to the abortion issue."

The right to die is also abridged in states where suicide is illegal, he said.

"I should be able to commit suicide if I want to," Shields said. "It may be the wrong decision, but it's mine to make. It's the same with the removal of

extraordinary means. The government can't force people to make the 'right' decision, because nobody knows what it is. It's a question of personal ethics."

The difference between euthanasia and removal of extraordinary means may be ethically fuzzy to some observers, but there is a technical difference in removing artificial life support that allows the patient to die naturally and actively facilitating the patient's death, Hodgson said.

"That's murder," she said. "I don't worry about any of our members committing murder. What we're concerned with is the transition from life into death of a patient who's being artificially sustained as they are being whittled down to 6 feet, 4 inches and only 90 pounds of bone and skin stretched taut."

Shield agreed that active euthanasia was not the issue, but personal dignity and understanding the limits of technology do need to be addressed.

"It's not easy but it's to the good that we think about these things," he said. "It's very important that society does not enforce majority judgment for personal ethical decisions."

But making clear decisions and enacting responsible legislation is hampered by the emotions surrounding the issue, Wing said. People tend not to think about the issue until they are personally embroiled in a case and unable to examine the facts objectively.

"One thing that's really unfortunate is in modern society our part in the dying of one another is something we don't talk about and aren't educated about, then you suddenly find yourself in a nursing home deciding whether or not to unhook dad," Wing said. Some national legislation that can be adjusted with technology needs to be implemented to deal with the issue of death with dignity, but until then it's up to individual states and medical societies to outline a plan, Hodgson said.

"Of course there may be a cure for anything with the current rate of technology," Hodgson said. "But for now it's prolonging dying instead of prolonging life."

# Czecks demand changes in massive Prague protest

From Associated Press reports

PRAGUE, Czechoslovakia — More than 200,000 people filled the streets of Prague on Monday, demanding free elections and the resignation of the hard-line leader in the largest protest ever in this communist nation.

For the first time in decades, major protests involving tens of thousands of citizens also broke out in other cities, state-run Czechoslovak TV said.

The protesters converged on Prague's central Wenceslas Square, then set out for Hradecany Castle, a national symbol and the residence of President Gustav Husak. They were blocked by police barriers and later dispersed peacefully.

Czechoslovak TV said at least 200,000 people took part in the march. It also reported 20,000 protesters in the city of Brno, 10,000 in Bratislava and 5,000 in Liberec.

"It's the end, Milos!" the demonstrators shouted, referring to Communist Party chief Milos Jakes. "Jakes, out!" Some carried banners reading, "Democracy for all" and "Red murderers to court" — a reference to the alleged death of mathematics student Martin Smid. Dissidents say Smid was killed Friday by police, but the government called reports of the death "an unfounded rumor."

Romania resists reform

BUCHAREST, Romania — Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu defied the reform sweeping Eastern Europe and said Monday the land he rules like a feudal lord will stick to its rigid Marxist course.

Thousands of supporters cheered and applauded on cue.

"The party cannot give up its revolutionary responsibility," said Ceausescu, president and Communist Party chief, speaking at the opening of the 14th Romanian Communist Party Congress. "It cannot surrender its historical mission to another force."

## News in Brief

He clearly was referring to reform in the Soviet Union, radical change in Poland and Hungary and the fall of orthodox communist regimes in East Germany and Bulgaria.

Romania is a regular target at international human rights meetings for suppressing dissent and restricting religious freedom.

Adding to the misery of the nation's 23 million people are years of shortages that have led to poorly stocked grocery stores, cold apartments and cars without gasoline.

Indian elections approaching

NEW DELHI, India — Campaigning ended in most Indian states Monday, two days before the start of parliamentary elections in which half a billion people are eligible to vote for 10,000 candidates representing hundreds of parties.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress Party face a tough challenge from a coalition of five opposition parties, known as the National Front and led by Vishwanath Pratap Singh, once among Gandhi's closest allies.

Campaigning ended Monday evening in 15 of India's 25 states and five of seven federally ruled territories, where voting will take place Wednesday.

Residents of nine other states and the two remaining territories will vote Friday or Sunday, with campaigning required to stop 48 hours before the polls open. Voting in the eastern state of Assam was postponed indefinitely because its electoral rolls were not ready.

Elections were spread over three days because of the vastness and diversity of India, a nation of 880 million people that has about 500 million eligible voters and is the world's most populous democracy.

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UNC's idea of a liberal arts education. According to Cell, the faculty thinks the minor allows a greater degree of specialization.

"Realistically, the faculty takes curriculum changes very seriously," she said.

Cell cited the marine science department as one that is interested in offering a minor.

"There is no B.S. (Bachelor of Science) in marine science. It's purely graduate. They wanted to think about it."

Hall said, "The most important thing for students is that most departments in the College of Arts and Sciences are in favor of the minor. That is a positive sign and a great step."

But Ruffin said, "It appears to me like this is going to drag on."

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## Minor

Ruffin Hall, director of academic affairs for Student Government, said he was disappointed with the planning of the minor.

"I think it's very positive that the overall response has been in support of a minor," Hall said. "I am, however, disappointed that the departments have not chosen to move faster on it."

"The issue has been discussed numerous times over the past couple of years. The departments were asked not to structure one but to analyze if they had the resources to offer it."

Cell said she set a Nov. 1 deadline for the departments to respond to her memo concerning the possibility of having a minor, and most departments met the deadline.

"A significant number of departments have indicated interests in officially having a minor."

"Only a few departments have had difficulty scheduling meetings at that time (in order to make the decision)," she said.

Hall said, "Some departments expressed to me earlier in the semester that they did not have enough time to discuss the feasibility of a minor."

"For the larger departments that reason may be valid, but for some of the smaller departments I don't see what the problem is."

Cell also set another deadline in mid-January for the departments to decide what classes will constitute the minor.

"If the different departments offer a minor, they must decide in January what the design of it will be," she said.

She said the faculty must decide if the idea of a minor would work against

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