

# CENTER *for* ETHICS *in* HEALTH CARE

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Dear Friends of the Center for Ethics in Health Care:

This year has brought both unprecedented challenges and growth to the Center for Ethics. We have done more teaching, research, and policy development this year than at any other time in the Center's history. For example, with support from **The Kinsman Foundation**, we will hold major conferences this fall in Bend, Salem, Eugene, Medford, and La Grande. I want to thank the Center's faculty and staff for their profound commitment and hard work. I also want to thank our friends and supporters for the opportunity to make such a difference in changing the culture of health care for the better throughout Oregon.

Now that the Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair is established, we are positioned to launch program growth. We are ready to influence major changes in health care in two areas. By supporting the POLST program, you will allow us to reach new audiences and spread the use of this very effective tool for assuring respect for patient wishes. By supporting the John Benson Program on Professionalism, you will contribute to the education of the next generation of health professionals in more compassionate communication.

As you look to your end-of-year gifting, please remember the Center for Ethics.

*Susan*

Susan W. Tolle, MD  
Cornelia Hayes Stevens Chair  
Director, Center for Ethics in Health Care

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## Making Health Care Safer

Health care is moving from a "culture of blame" to a "culture of ever-present awareness of patient safety." The Center is involved in revising the hospital's policy on disclosing errors to patients. We need your thoughts about how much to tell patients about errors—from serious mistakes to those that are narrowly averted—in their medical care. This will be the theme of our annual luncheon at the Multnomah Athletic Club on November 9, 2005. Call the Center for Ethics at 503-494-4466 for details.

## Does Morphine Hasten Death?

For decades, physicians have limited the use of morphine for relief of symptoms of air hunger when withdrawing a breathing machine at the end of life. However, in a manuscript to be published in the December 2005 issue of the *Journal of Palliative Care*, "Opioids and Benzodiazepines Appear to 'Paradoxically' Delay Inevitable Death after Ventilator Withdrawal," **Dr. Miles Edwards**, Emeritus Professor of Medicine and Clinical Consultant to the Ethics Consultation Service, challenges the dogma that morphine shortens life in terminal patients. We are happy to provide copies of this article as soon as it is available from the publisher.

## A Change of Plans

We have decided to cancel the auction previously planned for April 2006. Our host, Dr. Miles Edwards, has become seriously ill. In lieu of attending the auction, we encourage you to celebrate Dr. Edwards's accomplishments as a physician and humanitarian, and his work to support the Center for Ethics. We are deeply committed to refocusing our energy from the auction to Miles himself, and to supporting him on his final journey.

## National Attention to POLST is Growing

We congratulate **Susan Hickman, PhD**, and co-authors on the upcoming publication of her article "Hope for the Future: Achieving the Original Intent of Advance Directives," in the *Hastings Center Report* on November 10, 2005. The article clarifies that advance directives are useful for those in good health. They are inadequate, however, in meeting the needs of those with advanced, serious illness who want immediate, actionable orders to respect their wishes. The POLST form is the most successful tool in ensuring a patient's wishes are followed. We are also making major improvements in the POLST.org website. We thank **Karen & Bill Early** for their support of the national POLST program and their vision of what more can be done.

## New Medical Elective Begins November 21

The Center for Ethics and the John Benson Program on Professionalism are launching a new elective, "Ethics and Professionalism in Action." The elective will help senior medical students acquire the skills and attitudes they need to implement ethics principles acquired in the recently updated preclinical curriculum. There will be more information about this elective in a future newsletter.

