A message from
Center for Ethics in Health Care
donors Cornelia Hayes Stevens and
Lisa Andrus-Rivera

Maddy Nelson was to become the first of many steadfast friends who were drawn
to the Center for Ethics in Health Care by the vision of its founders, the inspired
leadership of its director, Susan Tolle, and the dedication of its faculty – all of
whom, like Pat Dunn, bring outstanding talent and commitment.

For those of us who have followed the Center’s work, the experience has been
exhilarating and deeply meaningful. We have witnessed and been part of
the Center’s progress in bringing greater compassion to the dying, as well as
remarkable growth in ethics education, palliative care and conflict of interest.

Our fall newsletter will announce new educational opportunities for those who
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As always, our profound thanks to Maddy Nelson for leading the way. Those of
us who have followed feel a deep bond with her and to each other through our
shared experiences.

UPCOMING events

JUNE 13, 2008
Statewide Palliative Care Conference
“Compassion & Suffering: The Art and
Science of Caring”
Co-Host: Adventist Medical Center
Oregon Convention Center

OCTOBER 29-31, 2008
Ethics & Palliative Care Conference Series
Northern Eastern Oregon

APRIL 16 & 17, 2008
19th Annual Kinsman Conference
Co-Sponsor: South West Washington
Medical Center
Vancouver, Washington

A legacy of compassion and integrity
The Madeline Brill Nelson Chair in Ethics Education

There is a serene stillness to Madeline Brill Nelson that draws you in and makes you
comfortable. Her bearing is warm, upright and dignified; her gaze alert and direct. She
is a listener – an observer who notices the tiny details and understands at a deep level
how each relates to the things that matter most in a life of community and caring.

The role of quiet pioneer comes easily and naturally to Madeline, and her passion to
make the world a better place is legendary. Modestly, without fanfare, she has dedicated
herself to countless causes within the community – a commitment to service that
continues in her children: Roz Nelson Babener, who founded and directs the non-
profit Community Warehouse; and Roscoe Nelson III, a long-time trustee of the Vivian
Milhon Foundation which supports medical education.

And, always, Madeline has drawn inspiration from the life and legacy of her father,
Dr. Isidor C. Brill.

As a young girl she would often accompany this beloved and pioneering physician on his
week-end rounds in southwest Portland. Observing carefully his unwavering attention
to each of his patients, she learned early on that compassion and integrity were the
cornerstones of his work. She witnessed over and over again the magic of his healing
touch; and instinctively she knew that his capacity to sit compassionately at the bedside,
to know what to say and how to say it, was every bit as important for his patients as the
therapies he had to offer them.
Inspired by the itinerant doctor who visited his boyhood home in Poland, Dr. Brill was propelled forward by the power of his vision of a new life as a doctor in the United States. His daughter, taking on that same mantle of deep caring, has a vision that is similarly expansive – to train health care professionals in the principles of caring and integrity that her father so eloquently embodied.

To this end Madeline has been a bold and generous pioneer in her support of the Center for Ethics. Not only was she the very first donor to step forward to support the Center almost two decades ago, when it was still but a dream in the eyes of its founders, but more recently she also endowed the Madeline Brill Nelson Chair in Ethics Education. With this extraordinary gift, an exciting new era of ethics education is unfolding.

Already, the new Chair has played a role in the debate around the widely-held practice of industry gifts, monetary and otherwise, at OHSU. And the Madeline Brill Nelson Chair has been a long-time leader in advocating for stringent restrictions on the acceptance of gifts from industry. And the Madeline Brill Nelson Chair provided new momentum for this initiative when it brought national ethics authority Howard Brody (the author of Hooked) to OHSU to speak about the pharmaceutical companies’ multi-billion-dollar gift giving practice. That momentum was boosted further by an April, 2008 report from the Association of American Medical Colleges recommending a zero dollar limit on the acceptance of gifts from industry. The goal now is for OHSU to raise the bar to match the high standards held by the Center for Ethics since its founding in 1989.

As Chiodo commented in a recent Oregonian editorial, “Even those little things – the pens, the mugs, the clocks – influence prescribing behavior,” reinforcing what significant impact this policy reform will have on how medicine is practiced in the future.

This kind of policy change will also be woven into the academic curriculum, as part of an ambitious initiative to deepen and dramatically expand ethics teaching at OHSU led by Patrick Dunn, MD, director of ethics education. Building on a rich history of clinical ethics teaching throughout the university, this work will create a uniform, collaborative vision for education in ethics and professionalism that will operate broadly across the university.

Dunn and his colleague, Phyllis Reemsterboer, associate dean of Dentistry, are currently leading a detailed analysis of exactly what elements of ethics education now exist within the curricula of each OHSU school. From there they, along with many other inter-disciplinary professionals, will determine how ethics teaching can be integrated throughout. And, in 2011 when the chair is fully funded, a national leader in ethics education will be recruited to lead the program as the first holder of the Madeline Brill Nelson Chair.

Meanwhile, Dunn and his colleagues continue to develop the ethics education already in place at OHSU. First-year medical and physician assistant students are now required to take what Dunn playfully describes as “The Seven Wonders of the Ethics World,” a remarkable progression of foundational teaching that takes the students ever more deeply into ethical learning. Informed Consent, Advanced Care Planning, Refusal of Treatment and Breaking Bad News are some of the important topics covered here – along with the always-challenging area of Death and Dying.

For fourth-year students transitioning to residency training, the teaching goes even deeper, offering comprehensive and practical approaches to thorny ethical dilemmas that could easily arise in medical practice. What, for example, should a physician do when an elderly patient is no longer competent to drive? How does an intern address the problem of an impaired colleague – a more common problem than often recognized? How should medical errors be handled – in ways that are ethical for the patient and instructive to the medical system? And what is a physician’s responsibility when a mentally-impaired patient refuses treatment?

“My dad was a teacher most of his life, and he was full of heart. He knew that information alone wasn’t enough, and how important it was to bring compassion and integrity to patients and their families.” Madeline Brill Nelson Lufky

In small groups, students study these dilemmas from every angle. They learn the ethical and legal principles involved in their critical decision-making. And they practice the nuanced, sophisticated communication skills required to handle each situation with sensitivity and compassion.

And so unfolds a kind of teaching that transforms students from competent practitioners to empathetic health care professionals who – even in the most challenging situations – can bring greater depth to their caring. As the work of the Madeline Brill Nelson Chair goes forward, this kind of teaching will be available in all OHSU schools where it is relevant, so that every student in every discipline will acquire the same higher standard of ethical awareness and skills.

As Dunn puts it: “Certainly we need students to be very knowledgeable. But there’s also a deeper part, a very human part to what we do that transcends the mechanical aspects of health care – active listening, compassionate communication, being mindful – skills that are both inherent in each of us and that can be enhanced and honed with practice.”

Dr. Brill would assuredly agree with that sentiment. “My dad was a teacher most of his life, and he was full of heart,” remembers Madeline. “He knew that information alone wasn’t enough, and how important it was to bring compassion and integrity to patients and their families.”

Madeline herself, often described as a “Guardian of the World” for the deep caring she brings to so many, feels immeasurably blessed that she has the opportunity to watch her father’s legacy continue to inspire, teach and grow. “He was the inspiration for my life,” she says quietly. “I feel so lucky that I am alive to see this happen.”
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Writer: Amanda Ashley

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