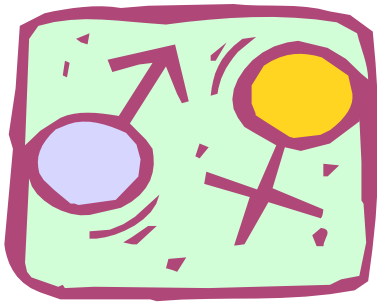


The Cost of Caring

Ethics in healthcare - matters for prayer



Sexual health and abortion

Britain has almost the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe, and one in five of all pregnancies in England and Wales ends in abortion. Sexually transmitted disease figures are rising alarmingly, with all the misery and potential infertility that entails. The most lethal sexually transmitted infection is HIV which causes AIDS, and numbers infected continue to increase. The government's response is even more promotion of condoms and so-called 'safe sex', yet academic studies are now confirming that this approach is actually counter-productive. We need sex education that increases the self-esteem of children and young people and affirms the importance of relationships.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for marriage, your loving plan for human sexuality, and for the gift of children. Please forgive us for the adultery and fornication in our society, and for killing defenceless innocents in abortion. We pray we may return to your ideal for sexuality and for family life, and we pray for an end to the silent holocaust of abortion.

Genetics

Work finalising the human genome continues though there have been fewer public discussions about the ethical aspects of the new genetics this year. Sex-selection, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, and the deliberate manufacture of babies to provide tissues for siblings, bring the concept of 'designer babies' ever nearer.

Prayer

Lord, thank you that we are all made in your image. Thank you that scientific research is teaching us more about the ways in which you made us. Please grant us wisdom to use this knowledge for good alone.

Cloning

A House of Lords Select Committee has reviewed Parliament's decision to allow so-called 'therapeutic cloning' in an extension of the 1990 Human Fertilisation Embryology Act. Amid controversy, it has agreed to allow use of human embryos for embryonic stem cells, which could be cultured and turned into different types of tissue to replace that lost by injury or disease. However, cloning is still not happening in the UK because legal issues about the definition of 'embryo' in the 1990 Act are not yet resolved.



Stem cells can be extracted from 'adult' sources and here there is no ethical controversy. Almost every week, new evidence about the suitability of adult stem cells emerges around the world. The UK is far more liberal than Europe and the USA.

Adult stem cell research - YES.



Using human embryos as a means to an end, and perfecting techniques which could lead in time to the birth of a cloned baby by reproductive cloning - NO.



Prayer

Lord, thank you that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made. Please help us to respect human life and keep us from trespassing in your domain. Please lead us into adult stem cell research rather than into cloning humans.

Euthanasia

The Netherlands continues to practise legalised voluntary euthanasia, although there are signs that GPs there are thinking again – recognising that their treatment options at the end of life are cut down by too-ready consideration of euthanasia by patients, their families, and society. The recent general election has led to Christian Democrats controlling government, and there are suggestions they might seek to reverse the law on euthanasia. This encouraging possibility is tempered by the fact that Belgium has almost completely followed the current Dutch approach.

In the UK the front door to euthanasia remains firmly closed, though there are always back door possibilities. Recent General Medical Council guidance on withholding and withdrawing life prolonging medical treatments has strongly affirmed traditional views, but a consultation by the Lord Chancellor's Department on decision making for the mentally incapacitated is worrying in places.

Prayer

Lord, please may the Netherlands overturn euthanasia legislation. Please may the Belgians think again. Please help us to know how to care ethically for the terminally ill, recognising that there is 'a time to die' but never hastening death.



Resources

Following the Budget, considerably more money has been promised for the National Health Service, and proposed changes to contracts for hospital consultants and for GPs appear to offer some hope for improving morale among doctors. The government has finally recognised that recruitment and retention of staff are key issues, but spending too much of the new money here might not lead to measurable improvements in service.

There is also the ever-growing problem of litigation – one pound in every twelve pounds the NHS spends goes on litigation or is set aside for costs expected.

Prayer

Lord, help us to be wise stewards of that which is spent on the National Health Service. Help us to have your heart of care for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Please restore the concept of vocation.

The global picture

Resource allocation becomes ever more controversial in rich Britain, but in the developing world budgets for healthcare are unbelievably tiny by comparison. More needs to be done politically in terms of international aid and debt relief, but there is always a need for health professionals and aid workers to take the compassionate care of Christ to the needy.

Prayer

Father, forgive us that we complain so readily and that we forget the far greater needs elsewhere. Please help us to give generously and please call out more carers into a world of such need.

HEALTHCARE
SUNDAY

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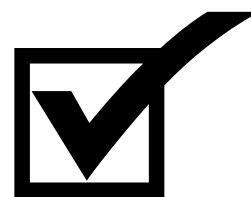


Action Points

We can pray. We can also get more informed and get more involved.

We could respond year round to Healthcare Sunday by, for example,

- lobbying on ethical issues;
- volunteering at an old people's home;
- helping in sex education for young people; or
- visiting at the local hospice.
- We could support a health professional working in the developing world;
- or consider going to work abroad ourselves.



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