

✓ The Maryland Institutional Ethics Committee Resource Network

DIANE E. HOFFMANN

The Maryland Institutional Ethics Committee Resource Network was established in July 1991 as part of the Law and Health Care Program at the University of Maryland School of Law. The purpose of the Network is to assist hospitals and nursing homes in Maryland, which are required by state law to have an ethics committee, in the establishment and functioning of those committees. That purpose will be accomplished by developing educational materials; establishing a series of educational workshops, a network, and a newsletter for ethics committee members; and by conducting research on ethics committee operations. The Network's Advisory Committee includes representatives from the following organizations: American Nurses Association, American Association of Homes for the Aged, Health Facilities Association of Maryland, Maryland Association of Non-Profit Homes for the Aged; Maryland Disability Law Center, Maryland Hospital Association; Maryland Nurses Association; Medical and Chirurgical Society of Maryland; and the Maryland Society of Hospital Social Work Directors.

The Network sponsored its first educational conference on 28 October 1991 on Implementing the Patient Self-Determination Act: Questions and Answers. In conjunction with the conference, the Network developed a slide show to be used by institutions in Maryland to explain the Patient Self-Determination Act and relevant Maryland law to staff, patients and members of the community.

✓ The Florida Bioethics Network

RAY MOSELEY

Florida now has a statewide Bioethics Network. The Florida Bioethics Network (FBN) was established in April 1991 at an annual ethics committee retreat and educational program of the Shands Hospital Ethics Committee at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Part of this program was to explore the need for an ethics committee network in Florida. To this end, an invitation was sent to the 100 largest hospitals in Florida to see if other hospitals shared this interest. Over 40 representatives from 21 hospitals attended, and there was unanimous agreement that the Florida Bioethics Network should be formed. An ad hoc committee was appointed to develop a mission and structure for the FBN.

A follow-up survey of every hospital in Florida indicated widespread interest in and need for a statewide network of individuals who participate in hospital ethics committees. (The results of this survey will be reported in depth in a following journal issue.) Many responses requested assistance and/or information about how to institute and run an ethics committee.

The second annual meeting of the FBN on 4 December 1991 was cosponsored by Tampa General Hospital. All hospitals in Florida were invited to send representatives. This meeting was attended by 83 individuals representing 41 Florida hospitals. Another 37 individuals from 11 institutions, who were unable to send representatives to the meeting, expressed interest in joining the FBN.

At this meeting, the mission and objectives of the FBN were discussed and agreed upon. By-laws were ratified,

which formalized the FBN's affiliation with the Florida Hospital Association, officers were elected, and a governing board was formed. The educational component of this meeting focused on current legislative initiatives that have a bioethical focus; proposed legislation that would simplify Florida's current complex and cumbersome statutes concerning living wills and proxy decision makers, and proposed legislation that would require HIV testing for all healthcare providers.

Given the demographics of Florida and the growing public and institutional interest in bioethics, the scope of the FBN encompasses not only members of hospital ethics committees but also the growing number of ethics committees in nursing homes and hospices, as well as any individual in the State of Florida who is interested in the mission and objectives of the FBN.

The mission of the FBN is "To enhance and promote members' awareness of and knowledge about bioethical issues, further preparing them to serve their respective institutions, other health professionals, and all health care consumers, and influence constructively practice standards and policy development in the delivery of health care."

The FBN has adopted four major objectives.

1. To provide channels of communication to identify emerging concerns in the field, discuss current topics, debate controversial issues, highlight ethical, legal, social, and

political developments, and reference resources for continuing education.

2. To assist the formation, development, and practices of institutional bioethics committees.
3. To serve as a statewide center to the Florida health care field through the collective knowledge, resources, and skills of the membership.
4. To conduct educational programs.

These objectives are to be met in several ways. The most visible will be a quarterly newsletter. This will be distributed to all FBN members and to the CEO of every Florida Hospital Association hospital. The major FBN meeting will be an annual winter business and educational meeting. This meeting will generally focus on one or two topics of special interest to ethics committees or on a topic of general interest. One educational focus for the next annual meeting will be the effectiveness of the various models for ethics committee consultations.

Current plans call for the FBN to also cosponsor and publicize regional meetings that will generally coordinate with a local hospital's educational conference. Plans are also being made to provide assistance to institutions that wish to develop an institutional ethics committee. Standing FBN committees will also be formed at the first board meeting in January 1992, including committees on "Bioethics Committee Practices," "Institutional Policies and Procedures," and "Legislative and Judicial Concerns."