

CHILDREN AND HEALTH CARE: MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE

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CHILDREN AND HEALTH CARE

Moral and Social Issues

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to my husband Arthur E. Kopelman,
a pediatrician,
and in memory of my mother
Gertrude M. Veitch Criden,
a nurse, LMK

to my daughter,
Megan Ruth Moskop, JCM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | xi |
| INTRODUCTION | xiii |
| SECTION I / CHILDREN'S HEALTH AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUE | |
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| BARBARA STARFIELD / Child Health and Public Policy | 7 |
| STUART F. SPICKER / Comments on Barbara Starfield's 'Child Health and Public Policy' | 23 |
| ANN L. WILSON / Development of the U.S. Federal Role in Children's Health Care: A Critical Appraisal | 27 |
| TODD L. SAVITT / American Social and Political Thought and the Federal Role in Child Health Care | 67 |
| ROBERT J. LEVINE / Children as Research Subjects | 73 |
| LORETTA M. KOPELMAN / When is the Risk Minimal Enough for Children to be Research Subjects? | 89 |
| SECTION II / CHILDREN, ILLNESS, AND DEATH | |
| INTRODUCTION | 103 |
| ROSALIND EKMAN LADD / Death and Children's Literature: <i>Charlotte's Web</i> and the Dying Child | 107 |
| LORETTA M. KOPELMAN / Charlotte the Spider, Socrates, and The Problem of Evil | 121 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| GARETH B. MATTHEWS / Children's Conceptions of Illness and Death | 133 |
| JOHN C. MOSKOP / Terminally Ill Children and Treatment Choices: A Reply to Gareth Matthews | 147 |
| SECTION III / CHILDREN'S AND PARENTS' ROLES IN MEDICAL DECISIONMAKING | |
| INTRODUCTION | 155 |
| ANGELA R. HOLDER / Children and Adolescents: Their Right to Decide about Their Own Health Care | 161 |
| ROBERT L. HOLMES / Children and Health Care Decisionmaking: A Reply to Angela Holder | 173 |
| DAN W. BROCK / Children's Competence for Health Care Decision-making | 181 |
| ROBERT L. HOLMES / Consent and Decisional Authority in Children's Health Care Decisionmaking: A Reply to Dan Brock | 213 |
| WILLIAM RUDDICK / Questions Parents Should Resist | 221 |
| H. TRISTRAM ENGELHARDT, JR. / Taking the Family Seriously: Beyond Best Interests | 231 |
| SECTION IV / THE ROLE OF THE PEDIATRICIAN | |
| INTRODUCTION | 241 |
| PETER C. ENGLISH / 'Not Miniature Men and Women': Abraham Jacobi's Vision of a New Medical Specialty a Century Ago | 247 |
| TODD L. SAVITT / The Development of Pediatrics as a Specialty | 275 |
| JOHN LADD / The Good Doctor and the Medical Care of Children | 281 |
| STUART F. SPICKER / Comments on John Ladd's 'The Good Doctor and the Medical Care of Children' | 303 |
| MYRON GENEL / Government by Case Anecdote or Case Advocacy: A Pediatrician's View | 305 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix

| | |
|--|-----|
| H. TRISTRAM ENGELHARDT, JR. / Advocacy: Some Reflections on an Ambiguous Term | 317 |
| THOMAS G. IRONS / Loving the Chronically Ill Child: A Pediatrician's Perspective | 323 |
| JOHN C. MOSKOP / Love and the Physician: A Reply to Thomas Irons | 331 |
| NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS | 337 |
| INDEX | 339 |

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Loretta M. Kopelman, Ph. D.
John C. Moskop, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Before a separate Department of Medical Humanities was formed, the editors of this volume were faculty members of the Department of Pediatrics at our medical school. Colleagues daily spoke of the moral and social problems of children's health care. Our offices were near the examining rooms where children had their bone-marrow procedures done. Since this is a painful test, we often heard them cry. The hospital floor where the sickest children stayed was also nearby. The physicians, nurses, and social workers believed that children's health care needs were not being met and that more could and should be done. Fewer resources are available for a child than for an adult with a comparable illness, they said. These experiences prompted us to prepare this volume and to ask whether children do get their fair share of the health care dollar.

Since the question "What kind of health care do we owe to our children?" is complex, responses should be rooted in many disciplines. These include philosophy, law, public policy and, of course, the health professions. Representing all of these disciplines, contributors to this volume reflect on moral and social issues in children's health care. The last hundred years have brought great changes in health care for children. The specialty of pediatrics developed during this period, and with it, a new group of advocates for children's health care. Women's suffrage gave a political boost to the recognition of children's special health needs. Also during this period legal rights were first granted to children independently of their parents. In recent years, too, the social and behavioral sciences have studied the development of competency and responsibility throughout the years of childhood, offering new insights about children's special needs and abilities. Most importantly, advances in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease have made good health care, like good education, housing, and food, almost indispensable to the proper development of a child's potential and opportunities. Since these advances have been the result of research, difficult questions arise about when children may be subjects in medical studies. Though government programs now subsidize health care for thousands of low income and chronically ill children, many still lack access to effective health care. All of these issues are explored in this volume.

The volume is divided into four sections. In the first section, we examine children's needs for health care and the history of U.S. federal initiatives to provide for those needs. Children's own views of sickness and death are explored in the second section. In the third section, we raise questions about what role children should have in health care choices, and what the limits of parental authority should be. These questions are addressed from moral as well as legal standpoints. We reflect on the role of those directly caring for children in the final section, focusing on the pediatrician as representative of all pediatric health care workers. We focus on the role of pediatrics, but do not intend to slight other health professionals dedicated to children's care. We would also like to acknowledge pioneers in educating the public about child health and development, especially Benjamin Spock, T. Berry Brazelton, and Haim Ginott.

Throughout the volume, we concentrate on the older child because, first, these children have not only important needs but also desires about their care. Second, the medical ethics literature on children's health care gives little attention to older children. Historians from a future age who survey this literature might conclude incorrectly that most of the moral or social problems in children's health care in 1970s and 1980s concerned sick newborn infants. We hope that this volume will help to correct that imbalance.