FROM THE EDITOR

Online Publication of the Hastings Center Report

This issue of the Hastings Center Report marks progress on two matters dear to my heart. One is editorial; the other has to do with the Report’s service.

The editorial point is that both of the feature articles, as well as the case study, take up questions of social justice. As some commentators have noted—rightly, I think—such questions tend to get shunted aside in favor of other, more zesty topics. In the lead feature article, Alex John London considers obligations that bear on Western medical researchers conducting clinical trials in developing countries where many people—potential subjects to the researchers—lack basic medical care. In the second article, Robert Macauley looks at the obligations of physicians in the United States to the large portion of the population lacks health insurance.

London and Macauley both argue for a broader moral field of vision. They suggest that researchers and physicians confront moral problems that are easily missed, and could address those problems in ways that are easily dismissed, if they focus too narrowly on the professional task at hand. In making their recommendations, both walk a line between hard-nosed realism and pie-eyed optimism. Tracing that line is a common feature of essays on social justice. It is in the nature of such discussions that the borders between what ought to be done and what is merely meritorious, and between what can be accomplished and what ought to be at least tried, are both vague and especially important. On this theme, Angela Wasunna asks in the column Another Voice whether London’s proposal is dangerously naïve, or even morally objectionable, in its views about whether and how researchers should deal with the governments of developing countries. She concludes that he discovers a way of going forward that meets her near objections.

Now to the other matter on which this issue marks progress: Some of our readers and not a few of our authors have asked in recent years when the Report will be online, and the answer, finally, is now. Starting in 2005, the Hastings Center Report will be available in “smart PDF,” a low-cost and authoritative format for distributing documents electronically. Because it is PDF, it will exactly mimic the print version of the Report, making it easier both to cite information in the Report and to locate information that is cited elsewhere. It is “smart” because it is full-text searchable and the citations will include links to other material available on the web. The service is hosted by Ingenta, a leading provider of academic and professional publications on the Internet.

Our goal in launching online publication is to make the Report easier to get and easier to retain. The online Report will be available a week in advance of the print version—several weeks in advance for some overseas subscribers. Once an issue is posted, it will be added to an archive maintained on the site. All six issues from 2004 will also be available, providing those who subscribe online with access to all of the Report’s editorial content dating back to January 2004.

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