

Medical testing is under attack

by John Grauerholz, M.D.

Recently the electronic and print media in the United States have been on a crusade against medical testing. The NBC-TV evening news in the Washington, D.C. area, regaled its viewers with horror stories about people dying as a result of improperly done tests by poorly trained medical personnel. The Nov. 23 issue of *U.S. News and World Report* carried the cover story, "Warning: Medical Tests May Be Hazardous to Your Health."

This has followed close on the heels of reports about the alleged inaccuracy of screening tests for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, HIV, the virus associated with the development of AIDS. The low point was reached when the president of the American Medical Association insultingly informed Dr. Cory SerVass, a member of the Presidential AIDS Commission, that AIDS tests were worthless because they sometimes give false positive results.

In the case of AIDS, it is the policy of the public health establishment, regardless of what the President or the American people think, that mass testing for HIV infection is unacceptable. In spite of the fact that the one area in which molecular biological research has made substantial progress is in the development of more definitive and specific tests for HIV infection, our present policy is to avoid using this capability, while waiting for a vaccine and/or cure, both of which the more honest molecular biologists doubt that we will find in this century, if ever.

Both the NBC series and the *U.S. News and World Report* article reported on cases of patients whose cancers had been missed on routine tests like Pap smears, and other patients who had been diagnosed as having diseases they didn't have.

The sophist school of argument

This technique is known as casuistic argument—arguing from "cases"—and is part of the ancient art of "sophistry," or more politely, as rhetoric. Rhetoric, or sophistry, is the general term for those arts of argumentation by which a weaker argument can overcome a stronger, in spite of the merits of the case.

This particular form of casuistic argument is not logical, but psychological. The insertion of these "cases" in a supposedly "balanced" presentation evokes in the mind of the reader or viewer the fear, "This could happen to me!" Once

such a fear is evoked, an emotional state is created which eliminates the possibility of critical judgment, especially in the minds of people whose capacity for rational judgment is small to begin with. The function of casuistic arguments is to "personalize" an issue in a way that obscures the underlying reality of a situation.

That underlying reality is presented in a recent study on trends in health care by Arthur Anderson and Co. and the American College of Health Care Executives. It is one of the most explicit admissions to date of plans to murder millions of Americans in the name of cost-benefit considerations.

The study, entitled, "The Future of Health Care: Challenges and Choices," is based on a survey of 1,600 "experts," and opens its summary of findings with the brazen statement that "dollar concerns will be the driving force behind America's health care agenda. . . . Policy will be dictated primarily by money."

As a result of this, the report finds, trends will include: 1) a system guided by market incentives; 2) closing of 10% of hospitals; 3) an 80% increase in indigent care costs to hospitals; 4) covert rationing of care as funds are limited for medical technology; and 5) limits to care based on factors such as age and ability to pay.

The most crucial medical ethics issues will stem from concern over limited resources, the report says, including the rationing of services and euthanasia ("the right to die").

"Americans will not accept rationing of health care. . . . Despite this, access to care will be limited by factors of age and ability to pay. Health care will be limited for the terminally ill, and organ transplants limited to those who can afford it," the report predicts.

Since laboratory tests are among the items to be "rationed," creating the impression that they are useless, or even dangerous, will smoothe public acceptance of their massive curtailment as the next collapse in living standards, under what President Reagan still insists on calling "60 months of sustained economic recovery," hits the population. This is similar to the proliferation of food fads which have accompanied the collapse of nutrition in the United States and elsewhere.

This is not the first such casuistic miracle produced by the "magic of the marketplace." Multimillion-dollar judgments in cases of rare side effects of vaccines, have created a situation in which drug companies have stopped producing vaccines or are charging exorbitant prices in order to build up contingency reserves for potential lawsuits. As will happen with medical testing, these suits also fostered a rabid anti-vaccination movement.

The beneficiaries of this diagnostic and therapeutic nihilism are the same budget-cutters who don't want to spend money on stopping the AIDS epidemic, which threatens the human race with extinction. The victims will be the fools who buy their casuistic arguments, and fail to force their governments to act now.