

Suicidal Client *Continued*

obligation toward suicidal clients is to help them reach a point where they can make an autonomous choice to live or die. This is indeed difficult, and many nurses will not only dislike this view, they will be opposed to it on ethical grounds. Autonomy, however, *should* be one of nursing's professional goals, for ourselves and for our clients.

Research is needed in the area of nursing interventions with suicidal clients. Without research we have no way of knowing if our approach to clients is effective. One appropriate research emphasis is the effectiveness of various philosophic models of the morality of suicide as an approach to nursing intervention. That is, how can practitioners use the philosophies of Aquinas, Hume, and the twentieth century thinkers to affect individuals' decisions about suicide? Research methodology may vary, but emphasis should be on use of philosophic theories.

Suicide is a tragedy in most instances. It leaves those who remain alive stunned, puzzled, and in pain. It is often said to be a waste of human life, and sometimes indeed it is. The act of suicide may have been unnecessary in that the emotional wound that precipitated it would have healed eventually. It is not necessary that we as nurses and as human beings approve of suicide or that we condone or encourage it. We are obligated, however, within the context discussed, not to interfere with it.

References

1. Greenberg, D.F., *Involuntary Psychiatric Commitment to Prevent Suicide*, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LAW REVIEW 49(2-3):246 (May-June 1974).
2. AQUINAS, T., SUMMA THEOLOGICA, Part II-III, Ques. 64, Art. 5.

Nursing Law & Ethics is published monthly except during the summer when double issues are published bi-monthly. The subscription fee for NLE is \$30 for 10 issues (\$17.50 for students in either nursing or law school). Pre-payment is preferred.

Subscriptions are begun with the issue immediately following the receipt of an order and run for 12 months/10 issues. Subscriptions will not be back-dated, however, back issues of *Nursing Law & Ethics* may be purchased for \$4.00 per issue. Since some issues are out of stock, some back issues may be photocopies. If you do not desire to receive photocopies of back issues, please advise on your order.

To order, send the coupon below to: American Society of Law & Medicine, *Nursing Law & Ethics*, 520 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215.

NLE

NURSING LAW & ETHICS

520 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215

Co-editors

George J. Annas, J.D., M.P.H.
Jane L. Greenlaw, R.N., M.S., J.D.

Executive Editor

A. Edward Doudera, J.D.

Assistant Editor

Elizabeth M. Ollen

Nursing Law & Ethics is published 10 times a year by the American Society of Law & Medicine, 520 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. Copyright © 1980. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without permission in writing from the publisher.

The views and opinions expressed in *Nursing Law & Ethics* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the American Society of Law & Medicine.

3. Hume, D., *On Suicide* in BEAUCHAMP AND PERLIN, editors, *ETHICAL ISSUES IN DEATH AND DYING* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1978).

4. It should be noted that not all persons who commit suicide do so out of a decision to hurt those who love them, but many do.

5. Beauchamp, T.L., *Suicide* in REGAN, editor, *MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH. NEW INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY* (Random House, New York, 1980).

6. Brandt, R.B., *The Morality and Rationality of Suicide* in BEAUCHAMP AND PERLIN, editors, *supra* note 3.

7. Mill, J.S., *On Liberty* in UTILITARIANISM (New American Library, New York, 1974), p. 135.

8. Greenberg, *supra* note 1, at 243-45.

9. Only one percent of all suicide attempters try again within a year after their first attempt.

10. An alternative rationale, and probably more accurate, is that health professionals have a *privilege* to treat unconscious persons because this is seen to be consistent with the desires of the vast majority of them. If, however, it later can be demonstrated that this person would in fact reject the treatment that is "saving his life" — the question of substituted judgment — then the treatment should be terminated if we are to protect the patient's autonomy. See Annas, G.J., *Reconciling Quinlan and Saikewicz: Decision-Making for the Terminally Ill Incompetent*, AMERICAN JOURNAL OF LAW & MEDICINE 4(4):367-402 (Winter 1979).

Subscription Order Form

Please enter my subscription to *Nursing Law & Ethics*. Enclosed is my check for \$30.00.

Please enter my subscription to *Nursing Law & Ethics* at the student rate of \$17.50.

(Please send photocopy of your present ID card.)

I am interested in distributing *Nursing Law & Ethics* to our staff or students. Please send me information on your bulk institutional subscription rate. I am interested in approximately _____ copies.

Please allow three weeks for the start of your subscription.

Name _____

Title _____

Mailing Address _____

Return to: American Society of Law & Medicine, *Nursing Law & Ethics*, 520 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215