

Centre for Human Bioethics

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A passionate love: The contributions of the late Professor Robert John Barrett

Anna Chur-Hansen

Celan's poetics of alterity: Lyric and the understanding of illness experience in medical ethics

Laurence J. Kirmayer

The virtues of feeling culturally incompetent

Leslie Swartz

Inside truths: 'Truth' and mental illness in the Australian asylum seeker and detention debates

Krista Maglen

Plus: News in Brief ● At the Centre ● Notes

CONTENTS

Monash Bioethics Review

Vol. 26 No 4 2007

EDITORIAL 1

NEWS IN BRIEF

Role of gene therapy in death called unclear	2
Better access to drugs could save 10 million lives a year, says UN expert	2
U.S. labs mishandling deadly germs	3
HIV mothers 'need focused healthcare post-birth'	3
Army enlists anthropology in war zones	4
Polio outbreak in Nigeria sparked by vaccine	4
Cervical cancer vaccine pledge for poor nations	5
FDA is failing to oversee human clinical trials, report says	5
Real hope in a virtual world	6
Poorer nations seek pain relief	6
Divisions deep over abortion ban	7
Sex and marriage with robots? It could happen	7
Bank plans probe of HIV tests in India	8
Could Afghan poppies be painkillers for the poor?	8

AT THE CENTRE

New book on ethics of publishing clinician performance information	10
Conference on health care apologies	10
Congratulations to our students	10

ARTICLES

A passionate love: The contributions of the late Professor Robert John Barrett

Anna Chur-Hansen 12

ABSTRACT

Professor Robert John Barrett died suddenly, after a long and difficult illness, on January 12th, 2007. At the time of his death, at the age of 57, he was Head of the Discipline of Psychiatry at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, University of Adelaide. His passing was mourned by countless individuals in Australia and internationally. The celebration of his life, held in the University of Adelaide's Bonython Hall, from which generations of scholars have received their parchments upon graduation, was an emotive ritual of which Rob would have both approved and also enjoyed immensely. The Hall was filled to capacity, with over 1,300 people listening to a collection of his favourite music and tributes

delivered by eight of his friends and family members. Dignitaries in full academic regalia, including the Vice-Chancellor, the immediate past and current Deans of Medicine, and the Head of School oversaw proceedings from an elevated position in the Hall, the symbolic meaning of which would have caused Rob to smile wryly. A reflection of his life in pictures, at the conclusion of the ceremony, before the pall-bearers carried his coffin to the hearse, evoked yet more tears and grief at the tragic and untimely loss of this man: an outstanding intellectual, wise mentor, gifted teacher, caring doctor, and true and loyal friend.

Celan's poetics of alterity: Lyric and the understanding of illness experience in medical ethics

Laurence J. Kirmayer

21

ABSTRACT

Psychopathology can render people strange and difficult to understand. Communication can lead to empathic understanding, which in turn can guide compassionate action. But communication depends on a shared conceptual world. How can language convey meanings that are not shared, that mark a divide between human beings or whole communities? A consideration of the poetics of Paul Celan sheds light on the power of language to bridge disparate worlds and on the ethical stance needed when empathy fails. Celan's poetics of alterity has implications for our efforts to understand individuals' illness experience as a grounding for the ethics of the clinical encounter.

The virtues of feeling culturally incompetent

Leslie Swartz

36

ABSTRACT

In a diverse and complex world, the notion of 'cultural competence' is offered by some as an ethical solution to health care work which is culturally naïve or inappropriate. Notions of cultural competence, however, may obscure the fact that many clinicians, regardless of background, may feel ill equipped to deal with difference in their daily work. Drawing largely on South African examples, I suggest that issues of cultural incompetence, linked both to personal anxieties and to the ways in which health care systems are structured, may be important to explore – personally, professionally, and politically. Through examining the difficulties of our own work and recognizing these, we may learn more only by learning a set of skills about the 'other'.

Inside truths: 'Truth' and mental illness in the Australian asylum seeker and detention debates

Krista Maglen

47

ABSTRACT

This article examines some of the key debates and interactions between the Australian government and medical profession in relation to the mental health consequences of the policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers. It explores how, in a series of episodes between 2001 and 2005, each side claimed to represent accurately the 'true' nature of

the detention system through asserting superior 'objectivity' and commitment to 'scientific truth' in their representations of the mental health of asylum seekers. Placing these debates within the particular political objectives of the Liberal Party during John Howard's term as Prime Minister, the article explores how science and medical advocacy have been characterized and made to signify larger conflicts within the Australian political arena. It shows how populist political ideas of 'elitism' have been used by the government to represent as 'elitist untruths' psychiatric research which has demonstrated a direct causal links between government border control policies and mental ill-health.