

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes of Council Meeting
Thursday 14th September 2006

- In the Chair:** Mr Dermot Gleeson
- Present:** Dr Alan Donnelly; Dr Dolores Dooley; Professor Andrew Green; Prof. Linda Hogan; Dr Richard Hull; Dr. Peter McKenna; Mr Stephen McMahon; Professor Cliona O'Farrelly; Professor Richard O'Kennedy; Mr Asim Sheik.
- Apologies for absence:** Mr Conor Brady; Professor John Vincent McLoughlin; Dr Darina O'Flanagan; Dr David Smith.
- Also present:** Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan; Ms Emily de Grae; Dr Stephanie Dyke; Mr Paul Ivory.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and signed.

2. Correspondence

Members were informed that a letter had been received from the Medical Council thanking the ICB for their invitation to participate in the consultation on advance directives (the Medical Council later forwarded a submission).

Members were also informed that a request had been received from the Norwegian Bioethics Council for a joint meeting between the two organisations to discuss areas of common interest. It was agreed that this would be a very worthwhile initiative and that a joint meeting should be arranged to coincide with a future Council meeting.

3. Report from the scientific director

Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan informed the Council that since the website had been updated it had received an increased number of hits.

Dr O'Sullivan informed Council that a playwriting competition steering committee had been established and that the members were: Mr Liam Cunningham (actor), Mr Paul Fahy (Artistic Director, Galway Arts Festival), Ms Aideen Howard (Literary Officer, Abbey Theatre), Dr Richard Hull (ICB), Mr Gavin Kostick (Literary Officer, Fishamble Theatre Company), Ms Orlaith McBride (Arts Council, Director of National Association of Youth Drama), Alan Stanford (Actor, Director and Artistic Director, Second Age Theatre Company) and Dr O'Sullivan. Dr O'Sullivan informed members that the committee would have its first meeting in the RIA on 26th September.

Dr O'Sullivan informed Council of her attendance at the World Bioethics Summit in Beijing in August and of the presentation she gave on the ethical issues arising from organ transplantation. Dr O'Sullivan explained how useful the summit proved to be by virtue of the diversity of countries in attendance.

Dr O'Sullivan was pleased to announce that SFI and RTÉ had approved funding of €30,000 each towards the production cost of the radio series. Dr O'Sullivan informed Council that it was expected a book of essays based on the series would be published. Council was informed that the series was due to start in February. Concerns were raised about views expressed during the series being identified as Council opinion. Dr O'Sullivan assured members that she would moderate each programme and would make it clear from the outset of each show that the Council was merely facilitating discussion and that the views expressed did not necessarily represent Council opinion.

4. Nanotechnology

Ms Helena Acheson, Divisional Manager, Science, Technology and Innovation Policy and Awareness (Forfás) gave a presentation to the Council on Nanotechnology. Ms Acheson informed members that the Government launched a science strategy in June, which had referred to the area of nanotechnology. She informed members that part of the strategy is to gauge public opinion on whether or not the technology is socially acceptable. Ms Acheson suggested that Forfás would hope to maintain contact with the Council in relation to this issue, as the Council was the expert group tasked with examining the ethical issues relating to biomedicine. Mr Gleeson thanked Ms Acheson for her informative presentation and agreed that both bodies should maintain contact. It was agreed that Dr O'Sullivan would prepare a briefing document on Nanotechnology for the next meeting in November.

5. Infectious Disease Conference

Dr O'Sullivan informed Council that the Ethical Issues in a Pandemic conference would take place in the RDS on 17th October. A copy of the programme was given to each member. The members were informed that politicians, policy makers and public health professionals among others would be invited to attend the conference. It was agreed that members of the Defence Forces, an Garda Síochána and Civil Defence should also be invited.

6. Stem Cell Research

Dr O'Sullivan informed members the consultation for the stem cell research report would be a two-part process consisting (a) of a series of meetings with stakeholders to begin in October and (b) a public consultation which would begin in early 2007. Regarding the

list of stakeholders, members suggested further groups to be invited to the meetings. It was also stated that advertisements calling for professional bodies and interested members of the public to make written submissions to the Council regarding the issue of stem cell research would be published in the national press at a later date.

7. Advance Directives

It was decided that any editorial comments would be sent in writing to the secretariat and that the aim of the present discussion would be to clarify the Council's overall opinion of advance directives. However, the point was raised that certain technical terms e.g. ward of court should be more clearly defined for general readers. Concerns were raised regarding the age limit for making an advance directive, which the draft report recommended should be 18, while presently in Ireland an individual can make decisions about their health care at 16. It was agreed that as the age of consent for making end of life decision was legally unclear, the report should explore the issue in depth.

The point was raised that the arguments upholding personal autonomy slightly outweighed the counter-arguments and that the discussion of autonomy should be somewhat moderated to alleviate this. It was noted that some opinions articulated in the concluding remarks warranted further discussion within the main body of the report in order to clarify the rationale behind forming those opinions. It was also pointed out that some of the concluding remarks could be made more vigorously.

It was decided that the secretariat would re-draft the document to incorporate the points raised and any further written comments and would include sample advance directives. It was also agreed that the new draft would be circulated prior to the next meeting, when it is hoped the Council will sign off on it.

8. Any Other Business

It was agreed that due to time constraints, the action points from the June meeting would be raised at the November meeting.

Mr. Gleeson informed members that the Council is to be restructured into a company limited by guarantee, which will have seven directors. Mr. Gleeson also informed members that it was expected that a proportion of directors would be made up of Council members who were willing to take on the role. It was noted that while the RIA would no longer host the Council they would continue to play some role in the future. It was also noted that the restructure would happen in the coming months and that new office space would have to be secured.

9. Date of next meeting

Thursday, 3.30pm, 2nd November 2006, Council Room UCC, Followed by the 3rd Annual Public Lecture in the Brookfield Health and Sciences Centre, UCC (7-9pm)
