

SURGERY

Synopsis

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Chairman's Message



Douglas E. Wood, MD,
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The Henry N. Harkins
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The Department of Surgery's "Center for Surgical Ethics" has been in the making for some time, but now is on the cusp of launching. Two important events helped to set the stage this summer and fall: the first was a Day of Surgical Ethics added to the 30th Annual Summer Seminar in Healthcare Ethics in August; the other was a special Grand Rounds on October 26th focused on Surgical Ethics with renowned surgeon and ethicist, Alberto Ferreres, MD, Chair of Surgery, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In this issue of *Synopsis*, I wanted to share why the Department is creating a Center for Surgical Ethics, what is driving its creation, what it is about and what we hope to accomplish.

I have long pondered, as I'm sure many have, what it takes to be a great surgeon. Beyond technical skills, I

have thought a lot about questions such as: "What do my patients need? How can I best understand and meet those needs? What do my patients *not* know that I can help them understand so they and their families can make the best decisions for themselves? And, how do I provide information and still let them make the decision, i.e., how do I keep from putting my thumb too much on the scale?"

All of these questions have ethical dimensions. The definition of ethics put simply is the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct, moral values, right and wrong, and standards of behavior. But, why is the study of ethics, in an organized fashion, important? Can't we just rely on our own moral compass? I began to realize that some systematic study of ethics assists us in deciding a course of action, and how we communicate complex medical decisions. Ethical principles help us articulate the challenging options we consider for our patients, and how to help them navigate their own healthcare decisions in ways that best reflect their own values and goals.

With these questions and realizations, I began to recognize that while I had good instincts, I had no formal method, foundation or vocabulary to understand how to raise and reflect on

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