

From the Editors

Our Special Section, Ethical Decision Making and Persons with Mental Retardation, begins with "The Journey of a Child and His Heart," the story of Philip B., a young man with Down Syndrome. Although the legal and moral debates surrounding Philip have been discussed in various media, *CQ* offers for the first time the personal and deeply moving account from the perspective of his pediatric cardiologist.

Philip's case dramatically raises questions and sets precedents about the rights and obligations of care givers, parents, and society in situations where the lives of the most vulnerable among us must be decided by others. His story illustrates the transformation in thinking from decision making on objective standards of what is medically possible toward a search for subjective criteria—what matters for this individual, and does continued life have value for him or her? Readers will undoubtedly compare and contrast Philip's circumstances and his outcome with the dilemma presented about a different person in the section Ethics Committees at Work, "Is Dying Better than Dialysis for a Woman with Down Syndrome?"

Another first for *CQ* is Walter Edinger's description of the development of an ethics committee in a residential center for the mentally retarded and devel-

opmentally disabled, along with advice for those who wish to develop ethics committees serving vulnerable populations. The unique setting for this committee raises ethical issues that differ from those that are more typical in the acute care setting and requires that an ethics committee make accommodations both in terms of its membership and in how it functions.

The most important points emerging from the *CQ* Special Section are 1) rather than stigmatizing less competent members of society, the label "mental retardation" should only be used to provide needed extra help and support, and 2) we should rethink our views on death and dying from the point of view of the least competent, an issue further explored in a forthcoming book, *Health Care Decisions Involving Persons with Mental Retardation*, by Martyn and Bourguignon. They have shared some of that perspective in their articles included here.

Finally, more and more attention will be given to the roles of the clinical ethicist and the proper training for such persons. Edmund Erde reflects on his experience in this regard, and Myles Sheehan and Erich Loewy explore deeper questions about physician training in ethics.