

What Do You Want From Your Doctor?
A "Conversation & Cuisine" Evening from Xenos Christian Fellowship

Situation 1

You and your mother are sitting around after Thanksgiving dinner. Although you and your two sisters live within an hour of your mother, it seems that it's only at holidays that you get together and chat. Your mother tells you that she has not been feeling well. Her arthritis has been causing her more pain. It's getting harder for her to get up in the mornings because of the stiffness. "I'm getting fed up with my doctor," she tells you. "He gives me some pills, but the arthritis isn't getting better. I went to another doctor for a while, but she was useless too. What's the point of all this modern stuff if they can't cure my arthritis? What are all these doctors here for anyway?"

- a. How would you respond to your mother's last question?
- b. Is the role of medicine different in cases of chronic illness compared to acute illness?
- c. Do we ourselves need to respond differently to these two types of illnesses?
- d. What role should you and your sisters play at the moment? What about in the future?

Situation 2

Things have not been going well. Your eldest child seems out of control, and you fear he is using drugs. You and your spouse rarely communicate, except to argue. And now your boss has told you that you are on the short list to be laid off.

On top of all this, you have this pounding headache that will not go away. Your doctor says he has run all the tests available, and can find nothing wrong. One of your friends told you about getting an MRI scan which revealed the cause of her problem. You tell your doctor that you want one. After a complete examination, he claims there is no reason to think that an MRI would show anything in your case. He says that the small chance of it helping would not justify its cost: \$1,300 to 1,500. You remind him that you have insurance, and insist on getting one.

- a. Do we have a right to whatever treatment we want? Does everyone?
- b. What do we expect from our doctors when we go to them? Do we ever have inappropriate expectations?
- c. What about the poor kid's right to immunization?
- d. Should cost ever be a factor in determining treatment?
- e. Is this a case of rationing or should we call it something else?
- f. How is the issue of personal responsibility involved here?

Situation 3

You are in hospital with lung cancer that has now spread throughout your body. Your doctor estimates that you will live for a couple of months, at most. She asks you if you would want CPR attempted if your heart would stop. She tells you that CPR for someone in your condition inevitably leads to the person dying shortly afterwards in intensive care. You insist that everything be done to save your life, which includes CPR.

- a. Why do people insist on everything being done?
- b. Does your doctor have to give you everything?
- c. What are the proper goals for medicine here: curing or caring?
- d. Is it relevant that it costs about \$10,000 per day to keep someone alive in an ICU?

Situation 4

You have finally gotten your life in order. Having been basically drunk since you were sixteen, you have now been dry for three years. You have restored your relationships with your spouse and college-age son. However, you have been extremely tired for a few weeks. Your doctor diagnoses leukemia. You have three options:

(i) You can undergo intensive chemotherapy, with all its side effects (nausea, vomiting, hair-loss, etc.). This will require many short hospital stays over a six-month period. A painful bone-marrow transplant will follow, requiring up to two months in the hospital. All this has a 25% chance of curing your leukemia.

(ii) If you choose to have no therapy you will be dead in a couple of months. During that time your life will be relatively normal, except for bouts of extreme weakness and periodic infections. For your last few days you will be so weak that you will be completely dependant on others. You will also be uncomfortable and have some pain.

(iii) You want no therapy, but you also want a large dose of barbiturates. You will use these to choose when to die. You want to avoid the final days of pain and being a burden on your family. You also want your doctor to state on your death certificate that you died from leukemia.

- a. How can we find guidance for making these decisions?
- b. If a treatment is there, must we pursue it?
- c. Option (iii) is seen as a way to keep control over your life while dying. Is this a realistic expectation?
- d. Why are we often reluctant to be a burden on others?
- e. What is the proper role of the doctor in these situations?

Situation 2

Things have not been going well. Your grades have been slipping, and finals are only a few weeks away. You and your spouse rarely communicate, except to argue. You were lucky enough to get a part-time job making \$15/hr, but your boss has told you that she won't need you after Christmas.

On top of all this, you have this pounding headache that will not go away. Your doctor says he can find nothing wrong with you. One of your friends told you about getting an MRI scan which revealed the cause of her problem. You tell your doctor that you want one. After a complete examination, he claims there is no reason to think that an MRI would show anything in your case. He says that the small chance of it helping would not justify its cost: \$1,300 to 1,500. You remind him that you have insurance, and insist on getting one.

- a. Do we have a right to whatever treatment we want? Does everyone?
- b. What do we expect from our doctors when we go to them? Do we ever have inappropriate expectations?
- c. What about the poor kid's right to immunization?
- d. Should cost ever be a factor in determining treatment?
- e. Is this a case of rationing or should we call it something else?
- f. How is the issue of personal responsibility involved here?