

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

We are entering one of the most exciting and, in some ways, one of the most challenging periods in science and health care. Mapping the human genome will bring changes in the way diseases are diagnosed, treated and prevented.

Gene therapy will take on new dimensions. Perhaps transplantation of organs will become obsolete because it will be possible to regenerate the organ or grow a new one from the body's own primitive cells.

With these tremendous advances will come controversy. Decisions will need to be made about how these advances are used and funded. The ethics of all of this must be considered.

These issues are not unlike that faced recently by the University of Nebraska Medical Center. It was an issue where scientific advances made here and at other academic medical centers across the nation were far in advance of the public's knowledge of and comfort with that science.

While this may seem disconcerting to some, in reality, this is nothing new. There always has been a tension between science, religion and ethics. Many of today's procedures and practices we enjoy and take for granted, such as vaccinations, were developed in the midst of public controversy.

Today, the public wants to be involved in research decisions. I believe we must involve the public in the discussion. Science and the public need to move forward together if we are to improve the quality of life.

University of Nebraska President L. Dennis Smith responded to the need to increase the level of public and scientific discourse by creating the Nebraska Bioethics Advisory Commission.

Modeled after the National Bioethics Commission, the Nebraska panel of experts and laypersons will discuss ethical and legal issues, and advise Dr. Smith on the conduct of biomedical research. The state commission will not be responsible for the approval of individual projects. There are currently processes in place at the federal level and at the university to approve research projects.

The commission met for the first time in May. In this issue of *UNMC Discover*, you'll meet some commission members and will learn about the expectations they have of themselves and of the panel.

All the medical, ethical, legal and moral challenges we face must be confronted with facts. Our challenge is to base our decisions about these issues on facts, not fiction or emotion. *d*

Harold M. Maurer



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