

Outlook on Lifestyle

Debating the issue of artificial hearts

DR. GOTT



PETER GOTT, M.D.

They're at it again.

Surgeons are back to implanting artificial hearts into human patients. Although these "second-generation" devices are miniaturized and state-of-the-art, difficulties remain; the patients die for science, the surgeons live for glory.

The "first-generation" hearts — notably, those given to Barney Clark

William Schroeder, Murray Haydon and Jack Burcham — were terribly flawed. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the machines were not as flawed as the bodies into which they were placed. However, the recipients hovered in a zone of suffering between life and death until they succumbed to infections or blood clots, both complications directly attributable to the artificial hearts.

Subsequent to these four transplants, medical specialists pondered whether ANY permanent synthetic heart could be developed and whether the nation's taxpayers should finance the high-tech, high-cost artificial heart program, instead of allotting the money to programs to prevent heart disease. Ethicists questioned the propriety of Humana Hospital's chief cardiac surgeon, Dr. William DeVries, owning a substantial portion

(27,000 shares) of the company that made the device. Could DeVries — or for that matter, any of us — maintain the prerequisite objectivity about selecting patients for transplant, in the face of potentially enormous financial gain? Isn't this a conflict of interest?

According to Ralph Brauer, an analyst with the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, the Food and Drug Administration did, in 1985, establish guidelines in a belated effort to regulate research into synthetic hearts. However, the really gut issues have yet to be held up to public scrutiny and debate.

For example, many doctors remain concerned that the degree of patient suffering exceeds the benefits of the artificial heart. How much suffering can we condone? Who decides? The patient? The doctor? The federal

government?

These questions become especially poignant when children are the proposed recipients of transplanted organs, such as artificial hearts, when the results of such operations are recognized to be grimly and consistently unsuccessful. An adult, even a terminally ill adult, can at least go through the motions of understanding an informed consent document and signing the necessary papers. How can a sick child be expected to have the faintest grasp of the significance of heart-replacement surgery? Most children today cannot appreciate the discomfort of mumps, much less the prolonged agony and stress of such a procedure. Even for adult heart-recipients, the psychological effects alone were more than they could handle. Yet, the experiments continue.

DeVries defended his work as "both a necessary experimental step needed to further refine the heart's design and as a therapeutic measure without which patients would have died." Herein lies the root of the problem: the differentiation between experimentation and therapy. The public has a right to know what procedures are purely experimental and which treatments are generally accepted.

For instance, today's technique of using artificial hearts as "bridges," to tide terminally ill patients over until human donors can be found, is purely experimental. It has been shown to be effective for some patients, but by no means all. Nonetheless, the press and the surgeons themselves often term these dubitable practices "life-sav-

ing" and "miraculous." Brauer points out that "conquering the gray regions of death seems almost a cultural obsession that makes us willing to tolerate questionable actions if they offer some hope of postponing the inevitable. In a country that worships youth, it is no accident that we speak of artificial heart implantation as a 'spiritual experience.'" He characterizes some heart surgeons as "Dirty Harrys with scalpels" and asks if medical experimentation has become an accepted form of euthanasia.

This is not idle carping. The use of living humans as experimental subjects or as the objects of quasi-religious medical sacrifices raises more troublesome issues than can be dealt with by our cumbersome, rusting, turn-of-the-century ethical system. People must think about these judgments, look them straight in the eye, wrestle with them, try to pin them down — or else we all could become inarticulate, robotic grist for future experiments.

While we continue to debate and discuss the seaminess of implanting artificial hearts, I hope that the children will be left out of it — out of the discussion and out of the operating room. Like so many other adult activities, being an experimental subject is grown-up business. Let us resolve to save children all the unnecessary pain we can.

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Stubborn child lured into car seat

POLLY'S POINTERS



POLLY FISHER

DEAR POLLY — My 2-year-old was getting quite stubborn about sitting in her car seat. Since I refused to drive anywhere without having her in the seat, we went through a lot of battles to get her strapped in.

Finally, I bought a doll's infant seat to fit her baby doll and strapped it in

Nominations being sought

If you know anyone who has contributed significantly to conservation in the last year let the Halton Region Conservation Authority know about them.

The HRCA is looking for nominations for its annual Ralph Sherwood Conservation Award for 1988.

The award is presented annually to citizens or groups who have demonstrated significant achievement in the area of environmental conservation.

Award categories are: individual, institutional and educational.

First established in 1962, the Ralph Sherwood award was presented to Peter van Dijken of Oakville last year for his involvement in the Ontario Bird Breeding Atlas project.

It is named after Mr. Sherwood, a 20-year member of the Authority. Nominations must be submitted to the HRCA by Jan. 31.

For more information contact the Community Relations Division of the HRCA, P.O. Box 1097, Station B, 2506 Britannia Rd. W., Burlington, L7P 3S9, or contact the Authority at 336-1158.

CVCA winner

The Credit Valley Conservation Foundation's 1988 Bursary recipient is Brian Grant from the University of Toronto, Erindale Campus. Brian lives in the City of Mississauga and is enrolled in the Biology Specialist Program, in his third year. Brian will receive a grant for \$200.

The Credit Valley Conservation Foundation's Bursary fund provides resources for students pursuing a career in the Resource Management field.

The 1988 award-recipients from the University of Guelph and the University of Waterloo have yet to be announced.

with the seat belt next to my daughter's car seat. Now she sees that the doll is strapped in properly before climbing happily into her own seat. It doesn't work every time, but the number of wrestling matches has certainly decreased! — BETTY

DEAR BETTY — Here's another innovative solution to a child-care problem! Your helpful Pointer earns you the Pointer of the Week award, a copy of my book "Polly's Pointers: 1,081 Helpful Hints for Making Everything Last Longer." Others may order it for \$6.50. Make your check payable to POLLY'S POINTERS and send to POLLY'S POINTERS, P.O. Box 93863, Cleveland, OH 44101-5863. — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — I use the flat boxes that pop cans are shipped to the store in to take my returnables back with. The boxes hold 24 cans, easy for the cashiers to count, and it's a lot faster than taking cans out of a bag one by one. Several people behind me in line have liked my idea. — LORETTA

POLLY'S NOTE: Ask the store personnel for a couple of these empty boxes to take home if you want to use this method. — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — Put liquid bleach into a plastic bottle with a trigger nozzle. It's not only easier to handle than the large bleach bottle, but you don't waste as much bleach.

Soak greasy or sticky pans in dishwasher detergent and they'll be easy to clean. But be sure to use rubber gloves when you wash them because the detergent is very harsh. — LU

DEAR POLLY — When my daughter was learning to sit up but wasn't quite stable enough to sit alone in a grocery cart, a thought came to me. I purchased an inexpensive adjustable elastic-type fashion belt that fastened by hooking together, and I used it as a seat belt. I used a light blanket as padding and fastened the belt around her chest and it worked like a charm.

I carry it in my purse so it's available wherever I need it. It's also handy for those restaurant highchairs without belts. This isn't a bad idea for those toddlers who don't want to stay seated — just fasten the buckle behind them so they can't reach it. — LORI

DEAR POLLY — I just solved the problem of birds landing on my mailbox! I taped a child's pinwheel on a stick to the back end of the mailbox. It works! Now all my neighbors are buying pinwheels. — ANN

Polly will send you a Polly Dollar (\$1) if she uses your favorite Pointer, Peeve or Problem in her column. Write POLLY'S POINTERS in care of this newspaper.

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Winter youth programs for bright children

The Halton chapter of the Association for Bright Children (ABC) is now accepting registrations for their winter youth programs.

Fees are determined for ABC members, but membership is open to anyone who wishes to join ABC.

Learning skills used by Olympic and professional athletes is a program being held Feb. 11, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at E.W. Foster Public School, 320 Cox Blvd., in Milton. The program is for children eight years old and up, and costs \$2 per child.

A Brass Rubbings Workshop will be held Feb. 18, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Oakville-Trafalgar High School. This program is also designed for children eight years old and up and is \$6 per child.

"The Superkid Syndrome" will

be discussed Feb. 18, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Oakville-Trafalgar High School, and is designed for high school students. Cost is \$2 per participant.

Another "Superkid Syndrome" session will be held Feb. 29, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Oakville-Trafalgar High School, this time focusing on students in Grades 5 to 8. Registration is \$2 per student.

For more information on these programs, or to register, call Mrs. Irani at 335-5082.

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