



Some final responses to Dr. Waugh

In the article "Abortion and our changing society" (*Can Med Assoc J* 1997;156:408), Dr. Douglas Waugh comments on the remarkable change in the attitude in the medical profession and the public toward elective abortion during the past 30 years. Since therapeutic abortion was legalized in 1969 and subsequently removed entirely from the Criminal Code, there has been a steady rise in the number of therapeutic abortions. What was once considered to be totally unacceptable for a physician, and immoral and unethical in the eyes of the public, has become widely accepted. This should cause us to stop and think.

We can ask ourselves: Where will we stand in 30 years if there are amendments to the Criminal Code in regard to the taking of human life, as are now being discussed? If mercy killing, physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia became legal activities — even under certain restricted guidelines — there would be inevitable progression until widespread acceptance of these practices would be accompanied by major changes in attitudes. The public perception of legalized killing would change. The medical profession's attitude would change. People who are elderly, infirm or mentally or physically disabled would be increasingly at risk. This is a frightening thought and not beyond the realm of possibility. We must be alert.

Paul V. Adams, MD
Winnipeg, Man.

Before we assume that the attitude of Canadians is changing, we should consider the likelihood that a

small number of Canadians are pushing for changes, whereas apathy to resist them remains a consistent feature of the Canadian public (and its medical leaders). With our thorough knowledge of human development many physicians, even those who perform abortions, feel uncomfortable with this issue of taking rather than saving lives.

I hope that physicians reading the article do not follow like sheep the implication that changing values are just an inevitable outcome. For people with genuine morals, right and wrong do not change with popular public opinion. Giving up right and wrong under duress implies that one's morals are not genuine. I should also note that former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was likely referring to the process of true justice, not a process that confuses legal and illegal with right and wrong.

Before we congratulate our society on its social evolution over the last 50 years, we should reflect on the outcome of the society in history that practised throwing people to the lions, or perhaps the society of the 1940s that practised execution of races believed to be inferior. Thank you for pointing out the work that needs to be done.

Timothy J. Cuddy, MD
Burlington, Ont.

Winston Churchill may have said that "the mill of justice grinds very slow, but it grinds exceedingly fine," but if so he was paraphrasing Friedrich von Logau (1654): "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

I yield to no one my admiration of Churchill and his command of English, but he does not need spurious attribution. Dr. Waugh, whose con-

tributions I much enjoy, will doubtless produce chapter and verse to prove me wrong, in which case I shall once again be shown to be a wrong-headed pedant.

Kenneth Macrae Leighton, MD
Smithers, BC

Dr. Waugh's reflections demonstrate an unholy faith that recent attitudinal changes represent progress instead of mere drift.

That "abortion services" are liberally advertised in his Yellow Pages hardly merits applause. Gratifyingly, my Yellow Pages contain 3 listings for local "abortion alternatives" and only 2 for Toronto-based abortion clinics.

By his minimization of the overwhelming cost in human lives (in that there is a "levelling off" of the abortion rate at "only" 15.5 abortions per 1000 fertile women per year in Canada) on the one hand, and by his description of the prolife resistance forces as "attenuated" on the other, Waugh seems to have deluded himself into complacency.

The fact is that new abortionists are now difficult to recruit countrywide from among "more-or-less respectable" physicians. Within various North American jurisdictions, serious political consideration given to delisting abortion services is yet another indication that tolerance for abortion on demand, as an acceptable form of birth control, is dissipating.

Most ironic in the weave of Waugh's article is the Churchill "mills of justice" quote, which is clearly derived from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

*Though the mills of God
grind slowly
yet they grind exceeding small.*