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Doctors shouldn't supply lethal drugs, experts say

United Press International
BOSTON — The lethal injection of drugs as a form of capital punishment — already adopted by four states — raises "serious ethical questions" and physicians should refuse to participate in such executions, two Harvard Medical School experts said recently.

Writing in the New England Journal of Medicine, Professor William J. Curran and Dr. Ward Casscells said involvement of the medical profession in drug-induced deaths represents "a corruption and exploitation of the healing profession's role in society."

"The growing adoption of these programs raises serious ethical issues for American physicians about their continued and expanded participation in state-ordered executions of human beings for crimes," they said.

Oklahoma, Texas, Idaho and New Mexico have adopted laws requiring

capital punishment by drug injections rather than electrocution or the gas chamber. Florida is considering such legislation.

"If the medical profession refuses to cooperate with these laws then it would effectively nullify them since nurses and other health personnel can only act on the direction and under the supervision of physicians," Curran, an expert in medical law, said in an interview.

"No medical practice act of any medical or allied health profession licenses its members to kill," he said.

Proponents of death by injection say it is less painful and less expensive than the construction of a gas chamber and that capital punishment statutes are less likely to be struck down by the courts as cruel and unusual punishment.

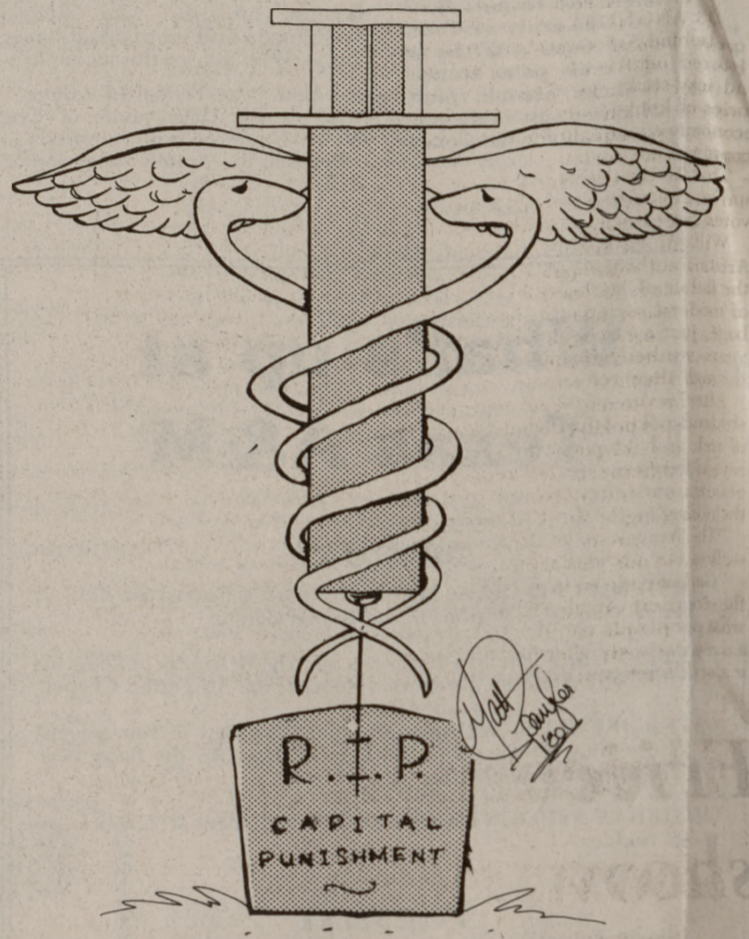
Curran and Casscells noted that physicians have historically played various roles in executions. But unlike other forms of capital punishment, they said the "continuous intravenous injection" makes a doctor "an active participant in a key human participant in the execution."

The article said the injections also violate the Hippocratic Oath which all physicians are sworn to uphold. The oath states in part:

"I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment but never with a view to injury and wrong-doing. Neither will I administer a poison to anyone when asked to do so nor will I suggest such a course."

The article said physicians cannot escape their responsibilities to the oath by giving responsibility for preparing and injecting the drugs to subordinates such as nurses.

"There may be medical colleagues who genuinely disagree with some or all of the positions taken above," it said. "Some will support capital punishment, and some will sanction various methods of quick relatively painless execution. Some will support medical participation in executions in the interest of administering



clinical services to the prisoner or will support witnessing the execution to assure against unnecessarily harsh handling of the prisoner.

"To be sure medicine has for centuries realized that one of its important functions is to comfort and relieve when unable to cure," Curran and Casscells wrote. "There is nothing new about medical participation in state executions. Doctors have been present at and have had roles in official executions for centuries."

However it said, "The medical presence at an execution gives the impression of moral sanction by the healing profession. To be both present and performing a monitoring role is worse."

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A&M researchers fight pests without chemical use

By CATHY SAATHOFF
Campus Reporter
A group of Texas A&M University researchers, working as part of a national effort, are looking for an environmentally safe, economical system of crop pest control.

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, led by Texas A&M's Dr. Perry Adkisson, is looking for biological and cultural methods of keeping farm pests below crop-damaging levels.

"Minimizing pesticide usage will be very beneficial to man and animals," said Dr. James Cate, state director of IPM.

At the 15 universities involved, 250 researchers are looking at not only the pests, but also the environment they live in. Texas A&M has 12 researchers studying cotton; the overall project is concerned with alfalfa, apples and soybeans as well.

Cate and his staff have been importing natural enemies of the boll weevil from Mexico, hoping to find one that will help control that pest in the Brazos Valley.

IPM seeks to minimize reliance on chemicals, because the drive for increased farm production has led to increased pesticide usage, which places a heavy financial burden on the farmer as well as harming the environment.

Heavy reliance on chemicals has backfired by killing the natural enemies of some harmless insects, allowing them to become problems. Meanwhile, the original pests have become immune to the chemicals.

"We want to use pesticides wisely," Cate said. He added that a few insects on crops are expected, but when the levels get dangerously high something must be done.

By considering each pest in its ecological niches, the researchers hope to establish a program which will allow farmers to increase production while cutting costs and conserving energy.

"The central core strategy of the IPM is based on the ecology of the system," Cate said.

Cultural control involves timing of planting and harvesting. Also, harder strains of plants are being developed, which will resist pests.

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