

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

'Who lives, who dies' when budget cut?

"Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides?" was the ominous title of an unprecedented nationwide closed-circuit teleconference that originated in Washington, D.C. to brainwash 14,000 doctors, health workers, and clergymen into accepting the need to answer these "tough questions" about the social acceptance of euthanasia in an age, as they put it, of "scarce resources." ABC-TV's Ted Koppel was the host of the four-hour marathon, which was beamed into 136 meeting halls to be viewed by carefully selected audiences.

The teleconference was a well guarded secret. Worried that normal Americans, or at least so-called "right to life" groups, would rise up in mass protest if the contents of such a pro-euthanasia conference were widely known, the sponsors responded with suspicion to every inquiry made by someone they didn't hand pick to inform about it.

As it turned out, the Club of Life, founded by Helga Zepp LaRouche, notified every major "pro-life" organization in the United States, but as Club of Life secretary Linda Everett reported, no one responded. Nevertheless, a lively Club of Life picket line rattled the panelists and audience that entered the "Biznet Studios" at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce national headquarters.

The conference was composed of three panels of "experts" which included Senators Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) and Paul Simon (D-Ill.), Rep. James Scheuer (D-N.Y.), ex-Secretary of Health and Human Services

(HHS) Joseph Califano, and Judge Paul Liacos, who made a recent ground-breaking court decision mandating the withholding of food and water from a patient in a coma in Massachusetts. To a greater or lesser degree, all the panelists were advocates of euthanasia.

The organizers of the conference, the so-called "21st Century Society" of the Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center in San Francisco (with funding from Blue Cross and a long list of other corporate interests), also were not beneath resorting to false advertising to draw their crowd. Current HHS Secretary Dr. Otis Bowen was falsely listed as a participant.

When Dr. Bowen's office was reached by the Club of Life, a spokesman expressed horror that Bowen's name was being used in conjunction with the conference. Although Bowen has a pro-euthanasia record of his own, he has apparently become very sensitive on the issue since taking over at HHS. His spokesman said that while Bowen once tentatively agreed to participate, "when he learned more about the kind of conference it was going to be, he quickly withdrew." Conference organizers, however, continued to use Bowen to attract participants, at \$75 a head, using his name on press releases sent out only days before the conference.

The conference format was a classic example of "consensus" brainwashing. Participants, including the pre-selected audience, were put into a controlled environment where they were misled into believing there was an actual free exchange of ideas occurring.

Koppel pretended to be merely the moderator, and ignorant of the issues involved, but was like the insidious controller of the "leaderless group" who craftily steers it toward predeter-

mined conclusions. He did this by repeatedly sounding the theme: "We are operating under conditions of limited resources." This evil fallacy was sufficient, virtually by itself, to insure the brainwashing impact of the exercise—and no one challenged it.

Koppel was aided by three theme-setting dramatic portrayals on video tape, played before the start of each panel. Diminished in their impact only by the dismal performances of the actors, the scenes included one of a man pulling a gun on a nurse who refused to "pull the plug" on his father. The video vignettes portrayed the "individual wishes" of the patients to die, against the "heartless" insistence of the hospital, or "the system" to keep them alive using life-support systems.

Koppel repeatedly intervened, even though claiming to be a "know nothing" surrounded by experts. In response to a question from a handicapped woman, Koppel preempted panelists by answering, "Listen, if we had unlimited resources, then, of course, there would be no question but that we would do everything in our power to provide the best health care possible to everyone. But we have a limited reservoir of resources. There has to be allocation." Repeating this refrain a half-dozen times during the event, Koppel chastised members of one panel for not having the nerve to advocate doctor-assisted suicide.

Alexander Capron, the former executive director of the President's Commission on Ethical Problems in Medicine, challenged the view that a patient can be in such "intractable pain" that he can be justified in wishing to "be put out of his misery." Medically, he said, that is very rare. But that didn't stop Koppel, who ignored the remark and asked again why anyone, even if only because of losing a leg, shouldn't be allowed to be put to death if he wished it.