

Editorial

Medical triage: barbarism, not justice

One of the originators of Blue Cross/Blue Shield told an interviewer many years ago, "When you control the health care of a country, you control the country." This statement has come to haunt us today. Lurking behind an outrageous nationwide campaign that purports to promise health care "justice" for all by eliminating expensive medical care for a few, is a threat to banish the Western notion of the dignity of every individual and to take the nation back to a barbaric age when man was seen as no better than the beasts that groveled daily for their existence.

Oregon health care officials have announced that because of a burgeoning economic crisis, they will no longer finance costly bone marrow, pancreas, heart, and liver transplants for Medicaid recipients. This policy forced 7-year-old Cody Howard, stricken with leukemia, and his unemployed mother to set out to raise donations for a bone marrow transplant that the state refused to pay for. Cody spent his dying days begging for the money that would secure his right to live. Donna Arneson, a 36-year-old mother without medical insurance, is not expected to live without a costly liver operation which Oregon's Medicaid officials turned down. Instead, the money will be "more judiciously" used on prenatal care for several hundred pregnant women. Oregon Gov. Neil Goldschmidt puts it, "How can we spend every nickel in support of a few people when thousands never see a doctor or eat a decent meal?"

Oregon may be the first state to formalize these treacherous rationing policies, but it is just one beat in a building national drumroll to institute medical triage as policy. At its deafening pitch, the demand is to forego the advanced technological medical care this country is known for, on the fraudulent rationale of providing "preventive" or "basic" health care for all.

"Who Lives, Who Dies," a Jan. 5 WNET-TV broadcast, "documented" how 37 million uninsured Americans have no access to medical services because billions of scarce health care dollars are wasted on patients "in the last six months of their life"; on Intensive Care of patients who will die anyway; or on resuscitat-

ing old people just because they greedily want to live a few more months. The program, funded by the Swiss pharmaceutical firm Ciba-Geigy, says the solution lies in getting more people to sign living wills, getting patients' families to forego expensive life-saving procedures, and starving to death the nation's 10,000 patients who lie in coma.

Larry R. Churchill, associate professor of social and administrative medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, complains in his book, *Rationing Health Care in America: Perceptions and Principles of Justice*, that Americans are hung up on the idea that society must do all that is necessary to save the life of each individual. This "ethical individualism," he says, is the obstacle "to the nation's ability to devise methods for equitably rationing health care."

The idea that there is a dichotomy between good basic health care and high technology is historically wrong, and scientifically unfounded. Basic health care is only as good as the country's investment in the extraordinary research and technological projects that made programs like the Apollo Moonshot possible. Witness the miraculous, life-saving spin-offs of the Strategic Defense Initiative. An SDI laser can cleanse blood of several viruses, including the killer AIDS; such discoveries could save millions of lives.

Nor is there any intention to provide this country's poor with even the pitiful basic care promised. It is well documented that leaders of Oregon's triage campaign are part of a national program funded by major insurance companies and think tanks dedicated to the elimination of advanced medical care, period!

One presidential candidate, Lyndon LaRouche, in his Feb. 4 national TV broadcast, explained how an economic recovery can be set into motion, which will allow us to pay for all levels of health care, even the huge costs of fighting AIDS. We challenge other would-be U.S. Presidents to say how they will meet this moral crisis. Or do they, too, believe that in the "INF era," the Western notion of the priceless dignity of every individual, is a value we can no longer "afford"?