

# THE POLISH CHAMBER OF PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS

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NRL/5835/01

Warsaw, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2001

*Secretariat of the Study Commission  
on "Law and Ethics in Modern Medicine"  
Platz der Republik 1  
11011 Berlin*

*Re: Answers concerning the work of the Medical Ethics Committee in the Polish Chamber  
of Physicians and Dentists*

## **I. Background to establishment of ethics commissions**

- On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1989 following the arrangements of "the Round Table", The Polish Lower Chamber of Parliament passed *a law on Chambers of Physicians* (Official Journal of Laws no. 30, item 158 with subsequent amendments). Thus, on the basis of this act of law the self-government of physicians, called chambers of physicians and dentists, was created in Poland. In December 1989 during multistage elections, the Supreme Medical Council of the Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists was chosen. The Council during its first session established the Medical Ethics Committee.
- The establishment of the Medical Ethics Committee was initiated by the first General Assembly of Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists.
- There were no alternative models presented.

## **II. Links with existing institutions**

- The Medical Ethics Committee has no political connections.
- The Medical Ethics Committee gives opinions of Parliament's drafts related to bioethical issues. The Committee through the Supreme Medical Council gives to the Parliament its

suggestions concerning legislative initiative. However, the Committee as such does not have its own legislative initiative.

### **III. Composition**

- The Supreme Medical Council chooses the members of the Committee.
- Politicians are not the members of the Committee.
- The Medical Ethics Committee represents exclusively physicians, and directly interests of the sick.
- There are no quotas laid down.

### **IV. Tasks**

- The Medical Ethics Committee has only an advisory function. The Committee suggested the content of the text of the Medical Code of Ethics, which was passed by the General Assembly of Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists.
- The Committee decides itself, which areas should be looked into and which issues should be given particular emphasis. At the same time, it is open for any suggestions from the medical circles as well as patients.

### **V. Working methods**

- The aim of the discussions is consensus. When there is no consensus: the opinion of the majority and other opinions.
- There are no strict rules, but usually a month.
- The Medical Ethics Committee participates in the works of the Standing Committee of National Bioethics Committees or Equivalent Bodies of Council of Europe. Additionally, it co-operates with other foreign institutions - not so often, but in a vivid manner.
- It has an advisory voice.
- The Medical Ethics Committee deals with issues of medical ethics, medical deontology and bioethics. The Committee co-operated with the Ministry of Health in order to establish “independent bioethical committees” to evaluate the projects of biomedical experiments. Such committees were established in Poland. The Medical Ethics Committee was one of the initiators of the creation of the National Bioethics Committee in Poland, and it took part in the works of the Parliament in order to prepare an appropriate act of law. Unfortunately, the Committee of the Lower Chamber rejected the draft of the act on 21st August 2001. Thus, the legislative initiative needs to be taken once again.

## **VI. Influence on legislative procedures and other political decision - making**

- The reports and opinions are presented to appropriate committees in the Parliament, medical courts, the Supreme Medical Council, and regional medical councils.
- The results of the Committee's work take the form of recommendations.

## **VII. Participation**

- The Medical Ethics Committee involves the public in its work by the publication of some recommendations, proposals and opinions in media (medical press, nation-wide press, and radio, TV).
- The deliberations are closed to the public.
- The committee uses Internet and hearings to get the public involved.
- Unfortunately, in practice such public discussion does not exist in Poland, as it is rather limited to small groups of interested persons.

## **VIII. Financing and internal structure**

- The Supreme Medical Council finances the Medical Ethics Committee.
- The Supreme Medical Council passes an annual budget of the Committee; the Committee determines the details concerning expenditures.

The Medical Ethics Committee de facto still fulfils the function of non-existing in Poland National Bioethics Committee.

We hope such a Committee will be created soon, and then the Medical Ethics Committee will be dealing only with the issues of medical ethics and medical deontology.

With best regards,

Dr Jerzy Umiastowski MD

Chairman

Medical Ethics Committee

Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists