

President's Report 2011

6th Annual Business Meeting 10/Nov/2011

BSEC has enormous potential to influence medicine, research, and other significant realms of daily life in the Caribbean, and beyond. It is an honor to serve as BSEC's 2nd President, and to have the opportunity to build upon the vision of our Past President Derrick Aarons. Derrick's professional qualities and character that made it possible to establish and sustain BSEC. Under his leadership we've more than doubled in membership and had some notable accomplishments including

- The promotion of research and dialog through Annual Forums (the quality of which is consistently superb) and Annual Newsletters (the 2011 edition of Bioethics Caribe is being edited by Vice President Shereen Dawkins Cox)
- Contributions to the establishment of Jamaica's National Bioethics Committee and appointments as its members
- Ongoing efforts to establish a National Bioethics Committee in Trinidad and Tobago
- The drafting of a Caribbean Template for establishing Research Ethics Committees, and its circulation to all Chief Medical Officers in the English-speaking Caribbean
- Receipt of a Wellcome Trust grant to support the 2010 Forum
- The appointment of prestigious bioethicists as BSEC's Honorary Members
 - Carl Elliott, Center for Bioethics at University of Minnesota
 - Ken Goodman, Director of the Bioethics Unit at the Univ of Miami
 - Fernando Lolas-Stepke, Director of PAHO's Bioethics Unit
 - Ruth Macklin, Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Past-President of the International Association of Bioethics (IAB)
 - Andres Peralto-Cornielle, Professor of Bioethics in the Dominican Republic and member of UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee
 - Daniel Piedra Herrera, Exec Secy of the Cuban National Bioethics Committee

BSEC has a responsibility to engage in dialog and collaboration with varied stakeholders. Increasing the number of bioethics publications of its members in peer reviewed journals will help to fulfill that responsibility and enhance BSEC's reputation. Building on the foundation laid by Past President Derrick Aarons, my goal as President is to further develop BSEC's visibility and credibility. Encouraging and nurturing bioethics authorship among our members is a significant step in this direction and the 2011 workshop on publishing bioethics (led by Dr Udo Shuklenk, Co-Editor of Bioethics and Developing World Bioethics) supports that goal.

Bioethics publications may center on empirical data as well as theory, narrative, and/or context. Interdisciplinary projects and publications enhance bioethics by extending its relevance into the sciences, social sciences, economics, politics, and policymaking. Caribbean perspectives on bioethics may have relevance within and beyond the region. What might BSEC members write about?

Since its inception in the 1960's bioethics has tended to focus on autonomy more than on other principles. Autonomy and respect for persons are understood differently in wealthy democratic nations than in nations where economic and political context thwart abilities to exercise individual autonomy. Several recent publications note that bioethics overemphasizes North American values like autonomy, and that doing so marginalizes attention to socioeconomic and cultural contexts that impact health and health disparities.

Overemphasis on North American values is a form of bias that permits bioethics to sidestep moral problems in low and middle income nations. Even prestigious international bioethics programs perpetuate this bias in their curricula, research, and publications. However, in its report this year the U.S. Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues highlighted the principles of public beneficence, responsible stewardship, democratic deliberation, and justice. The report commented that burdens and benefits should be shared across society; that democratically obtained decisions require ongoing evaluation of risks, burdens, and benefits; and that social responsibility warrants greater attention. These comments may help to divert attention from autonomy to community and societal issues like utility, justice, and the responsibilities of health systems and nations.

BSEC can help bioethics to look beyond its North American orientation and better understand the priorities of low and middle income nations. It can help to document how priorities and values change with time and circumstance. BSEC's choice of theme for its 2011 Forum 'Ethics, Stigma, and Equality' was a timely step in furthering this agenda. BSEC and its members, however, can also begin to explore and document Caribbean conditions, values, and priorities that bear on health and healthcare. The Caribbean context raises unusual concerns about paternalism, privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, conflicts of interest, and research priorities.

BSEC members ought to undertake interdisciplinary investigations into such issues, and how Caribbean values and societal circumstances affect regional interpretation and implementation of bioethical principles and standards. How are nations to protect patient rights or privacy without the necessary resources, or when the sharing of personal information about illness and/or hardship within families and communities is a cultural norm? BSEC members are ideally placed to ask, and begin to answer, such questions in light of the realities of Caribbean culture and socioeconomic conditions.

Such work would be of great interest to mainstream bioethics journals, and particularly to *Developing World Bioethics (DWB)*. Derrick and I both serve on its editorial board, and we jointly published a paper therein about undertreated pain in the region. Authoring at a publishable standard takes time and energy. If not quite up to that standard, BSEC members attempts to write reflective or empirical reports might be published in our newsletter *Bioethics Caribe* to inform and motivate others, and to provide experience writing and editing.

To make BSEC more visible, credible, and influential I have worked closely with our Executive to and to fund and develop a more vibrant website, and to establish a Secretariat that will indefinitely be based in and funded by the Bioethics Dept at SGU. BSEC's new website is a work in progress subject to guidance from its Executive and membership.

At the urging of our Executive, I have the pleasure of launching our new website now during our 2011 ABM: <http://www.bioethicscaribe.org/>. BSEC's new website will be easier to navigate; updated regularly; better inform our members and others about BSEC's purpose and accomplishments; help to increase membership; and facilitate payment of dues online.

- The home page carries our mission, constitution, and background
- Resources including BSEC newsletters and its Research Ethics Template are accessible
- The current Executive is listed and contact information for the Secretariat is provided
- The membership application, types of membership, and annual dues for each type of membership are provided

This is an exciting time for BSEC which is poised to generate and participate in dialog about Caribbean priorities and values, and to inform and enhance the entire discipline of bioethics. As President I am grateful for the opportunity to support our mission by motivating dialog and authorship.

Submitted by Cheryl Macpherson, PhD., BSEC President, 2010-2012
Professor and Chair, Bioethics Department, St George's University School of Medicine, Grenada

.....

BSEC's Mission: "To increase knowledge and understanding of bioethics through promoting and fostering deliberations across the English-speaking Caribbean, as well as through international collaboration, thereby making a significant contribution to the overall development and implementation of bioethics in human and animal healthcare, research and policy-making"