

Fairbank State Hospital

David J. Vail, M.D., Medical Director
Department of Public Welfare

October 24, 1967

E. J. Engberg, M.D., Superintendent

In the October 5 issue of The New England Journal of Medicine under "Correspondence" I saw the following letter by Douglas H. Ingram, Fourth-Year Student, New York University, School of Medicine, that I thought might be of interest to you:

When Rights Are Burdens

To the Editor: For his provocative article, "The Rights of Patients." (New Eng. J. Med. 277:407-411, 1967), Dean Chiles has won my respect for the positive stand he has taken on the rights of patients to privacy, pain, truth and death.

But simply because we recognize the existence and dignity of these rights does not require that we place such burden on people incapable of supporting them. I dare say that few of the general population, healthy or ill, demonstrate the attitude of Dean Chiles.

For the majority of people the right to privacy during illness—if granted—becomes the despair of loneliness; the right to pain unalleviated by the casual question, "How are you this morning," becomes an obstacle to the much needed self-deception that accompanies the only courteous reply, "Better, thank you"; an honest assessment of an illness becomes the irrevocable sentence of an unseen judge; and the right to death becomes the boundless horror of a frantic gasp for life.

Except for the few like Dean Chiles, our patients somehow indicate the desire to forgo their rights.

The sensitivity to determine which patient can endure which of these rights belongs to the art of medicine, and it is from articles, statements, and pleas, like those of Dean Chiles, that we are reminded that the practice of medicine requires such human sensitivity."

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DEPARTMENT Public Welfare

Office Memorandum

TO : Dr. E. J. Engberg, Superintendent
Faribault State Hospital

FROM : David J. Vail, M. D.
Medical Director

SUBJECT: Letter by Ingram

DATE: October 30, 1967

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Thanks for your memo of October 24, 1967, quoting the letter by Mr. Douglas H. Ingram. I think this is very well stated. I will pass it along to Mrs. Miriam Karlins, who might want to bring it to the attention of the Humane Practices Committee.

DJV:rcj

CGC/m ✓
11/1/67

