

September 30, 2008

Laurence J. Eckel, M.D.
Mayo Clinic
Consultant, Institute for Educational Initiatives
O216 Hesburgh Center
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Laurence:

Biomedical science is a rapidly evolving field that regularly raises critical questions about biomedical ethics and U.S. healthcare policy. Because the manner in which the field develops will likely affect in fundamental ways the medical treatment individuals receive, and even our conception of the human person, it is important for Notre Dame to evaluate whether it can and should provide a distinctive and influential voice in the contemporary national dialogue on these topics. By actively participating in this dialogue, Notre Dame could benefit society generally by offering a valuable perspective on controversial and urgent issues involving bioethics and healthcare policy, and our students and faculty particularly by enhancing the educational and research resources the University devotes to the field. I write to invite you to participate on a newly established committee to study these issues—the Ad Hoc Committee on Bioethics and Healthcare Policy. I am pleased to report that Rev. Timothy Scully, C.S.C., has agreed to chair this Committee.

The basic charge to the Committee is to evaluate the feasibility, viability, and advisability of Notre Dame's participation in this dialogue. The Ad Hoc Committee should explore all the issues it believes are relevant to this broad charge, including but not limited to the following:

1. Identify relevant topics in biomedical ethics and healthcare policy where Notre Dame might make a meaningful impact, beginning with existing on-campus expertise and interest.
2. Explore the possibility of developing partnerships with other established centers of known similar goals and reputation (e.g., Mayo Clinic, Creighton Medical Center, Catholic Health Association, and major Catholic health networks, among others), seeking to leverage expertise and influence.

3. Explore the usefulness of sponsoring a conference, after the upcoming U.S. Presidential election, to introduce key national participants to Notre Dame and each other, seeking to enhance our understanding of Notre Dame's potential role and contributions.
4. Explore whether a Healthcare Policy Program and/or Bioethics Program should be established to promote scholarship and informed comment on pressing contemporary issues of biomedical ethics and healthcare policy, while educating our students and constituencies on the important implications of new developments in these rapidly changing areas.

I look forward to meeting with the Ad Hoc Committee at its first meeting to discuss this charge in more detail. I stand ready to help the Ad Hoc Committee in any ways I can. It is more important to provide a thoughtful and thorough report than a rapid one, but I hope the Ad Hoc Committee can complete a report of its findings, observations, and recommendations by July 1, 2009.

As soon as the Ad Hoc Committee is formed, I will send each member a list of all members of the Committee and their contact information.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you wish to discuss this request before answering, please feel free to call me at 1-6631 or contact me by email at tburish@nd.edu.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas G. Burish