The Coat of Arms
1818
Medical Department of the Army

A 1976 etching by Vassil Ekimov of an original color print that appeared in *The Military Surgeon, Vol XLI, No 2, 1917*
The first line of medical defense in wartime is the combat medic. Although in ancient times medics carried the caduceus into battle to signify the neutral, humanitarian nature of their tasks, they have never been immune to the perils of war. They have made the highest sacrifices to save the lives of others, and their dedication to the wounded soldier is the foundation of military medical care.
Textbooks of Military Medicine

Published by the

Office of The Surgeon General
Department of the Army, United States of America

Editor in Chief and Director
Dave E. Lounsbury, MD, FACP
Colonel, MC, US Army
Borden Institute
Assistant Professor of Medicine
F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Military Medical Editor
Ronald F. Bellamy, MD
Colonel, US Army, Retired
Borden Institute
Associate Professor of Military Medicine
F. Edward Hébert School of Medicine
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
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Art: Courtesy of Novartis Pharmaceuticals.
MILITARY MEDICAL ETHICS
VOLUME 2

Specialty Editors

THOMAS E. BEAM, MD
Formerly Director, Borden Institute
Formerly, Medical Ethics Consultant to The Surgeon General, United States Army

LINETTE R. SPARACINO, MA
Borden Institute

Section Editor

MEDICAL ETHICS IN THE MILITARY
THOMAS E. BEAM, MD
Formerly Director, Borden Institute
Formerly, Medical Ethics Consultant to The Surgeon General, United States Army

Office of The Surgeon General
United States Army
Falls Church, Virginia

Borden Institute
Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Washington, DC

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Bethesda, Maryland

2003
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Published by the Office of The Surgeon General at TMM Publications
Borden Institute
Walter Reed Army Medical Center
Washington, DC 20307-5001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Military medical ethics / specialty editors, Thomas E. Beam, Linette R. Sparacino ; section editors, Edmund D. Pellegrino, Anthony E. Hartle, Edmund G. Howe. p. ; cm. -- (Textbooks of military medicine)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
RC971.M638 2003
174'.2—dc22 2003057728
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Contributors

PAUL J. AMOROSO, MD, MPH
Colonel, Medical Corps, United States Army; Research Epidemiologist and Project Director, Total Army Injury and Health Outcomes Database Project, United States Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, MCMR-EMP, 42 Kansas Street, Natick, Massachusetts 01760-5007

ANTHONY C. AREND, PhD
Professor of Government and Adjunct Professor of Law, Georgetown University, 4000 Reservoir Road, Washington, DC 20056

THOMAS E. BEAM, MD
Colonel (Retired), Medical Corps, United States Army

BRIAN S. CARTER, MD, FAAP
Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt University, A-0126 Medical Center North, Nashville, Tennessee 37232-23707

DAVID M. DeDONATO, MDiv, MA, BCC (APC)
Director of Pastoral Care, Lexington Medical Center, West Columbia, South Carolina 29169

NICHOLAS G. FOTION, PhD
Professor, Department of Philosophy, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia 30322

MICHAEL E. FRISINA, MA
Administrative Director, Surgical Services, Tuomey Healthcare System, 129 North Washington Street, Sumter, South Carolina 29150

SHELDON H. HARRIS, PhD
Professor Emeritus of History, California State University, Northridge, California (Dr. Harris died August 31, 2002)

ANTHONY E. HARTLE, PhD
Colonel, Corps of Professors, United States Military Academy, United States Army; Professor of Philosophy, Department of English, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York 10996-1791

JOHN COLLINS HARVEY, MD, PhD
Professor of Medicine Emeritus, Georgetown University; Senior Research Scholar, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University; and Senior Research Scholar, Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University Medical Center, 4000 Reservoir Road, NW, #D-238, Washington, DC 20057

EDMUND D. PELLEGRINO, MD, MACP
John Carroll Professor of Medicine and Medical Ethics, Georgetown University; Senior Research Scholar, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University; and Senior Research Scholar, Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University Medical Center, 4000 Reservoir Road, NW, #D-238, Washington, DC 20057

ROBERT S. POZOS, PhD
Professor of Biology, San Diego State University, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, California 92182-4616

ROBERT N. PROCTOR, PhD
Helen and Walter Ferree Professor of the History of Science and Co-Director, Science, Medicine, and Technology in Culture, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania 16802

DOMINIC RASCONA, MD, FACP, FCCP
Commander, Medical Corps, United States Navy; Assistant Director, Critical Care, Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, Virginia

ELSPETH CAMERON RITCHIE, MD
Lieutenant Colonel, Medical Corps, United States Army; Program Director, Mental Health Policy and Women’s Health Issues, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Health Affairs, Skyline 5, Suite 601, 5111 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Virginia 22041-3206

SUSAN E. LEDERER, PhD
Assistant Professor, Section of the History of Medicine, Yale University School of Medicine, Yale University, 333 Cedar Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-8015

BARRY S. LEVY, MD, MPH
Adjunct Professor of Community Health, Tufts University School of Medicine, 20 North Main Street, #200, Post Office Box 1230, Sherborn, Massachusetts 01770

WILLIAM MADDEN, MD
Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics and Steele Memorial Children’s Research Center, College of Medicine, University of Arizona, 1501 North Campbell Avenue, Tucson, Arizona 85724

RICK D. MATHIS, JD, MDiv, MA
Lieutenant Colonel, Chaplain Corps, United States Army; Staff Chaplain, 18th Military Police Brigade, Mannheim, Germany; HHC 18th MP Bde, Unit 29708, APO AE 09028

ROBERT L. MOTT, MD, MPH
Major, Medical Corps, United States Army; Deputy Director, General Preventive Medicine Residency, United States Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, Building 503, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-7500

WILLIAM V. O’BRIEN, PhD
Professor of Government Emeritus (Retired), Georgetown University, 4000 Reservoir Road, Washington, DC 20056

EDMUND G. HOWE, MD, JD
Director, Programs in Ethics, Professor of Psychiatry, and Associate Professor of Medicine, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, 4301 Jones Bridge Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20814; and Chair, Committee of Department of Defense Ethics Consultants to the Surgeons General

WILLIAM V. O’BRIEN, PhD
Professor of Government Emeritus (Retired), Georgetown University, 4000 Reservoir Road, Washington, DC 20056

EDMUND G. HOWE, MD, JD
Director, Programs in Ethics, Professor of Psychiatry, and Associate Professor of Medicine, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, 4301 Jones Bridge Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20814; and Chair, Committee of Department of Defense Ethics Consultants to the Surgeons General

Faris R. Kirkland, PhD
Lieutenant Colonel (Retired), Field Artillery, United States Army (Dr. Kirkland died February 22, 2000)
VICTOR W. SIDEL, MD  
Distinguished University Professor of Social Medicine, Montefiore Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 111 East 210th Street, Bronx, New York 10467; Adjunct Professor of Public Health, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, New York

JANET R. SOUTHBY, RN, DNSc  
Colonel (Retired), Nurse Corps, United States Army; Associate Director, Interagency Institute for Federal Health Care Executives, School of Public Health and Health Services, The George Washington University Medical Center, Washington, DC

JAY STANLEY, PhD  
Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Director, Symposium for Peace, War and Military Studies, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Towson University, Towson, Maryland 21204-7097

DANIEL P. SULMASY, OFM, MD, PhD  
Professor of Medicine and Director of the Bioethics Institute, New York Medical College, Valhalla, New York; and Sisters of Charity Chair in Ethics, John J. Conley Department of Ethics, Saint Vincent’s Hospital and Medical Center, 153 West 11th Street, New York, New York 10011

DAVID C. THOMASMA, PhD  
Professor and English Chair of Medical Ethics, Neiswanger Institute of Bioethics and Health Policy, Stritch School of Medicine, Loyola University Chicago, 2160 South First Avenue, Maywood, Illinois 60153 (Dr. Thomasma died April 25, 2002)

SANDRA L. VISSE, PhD  
Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

LEWIS C. VOLLMAR, Jr, MD, MBA, MA (Law)  
Colonel (Retired), Medical Corps, United States Army Reserve; Dermatology Section Chief, St. Anthony’s Hospital, 10004 Kennerly Road, Suite 300, St. Louis, Missouri 63128-2175

LYNN L. WENGTER, MBA  
Formerly, Human Research Support Program Coordinator, The Soldiers Systems Command, Natick, Massachusetts

JOAN T. ZAJTCHUK, MD, SPEC IN HSA  
Colonel (Retired), Medical Corps, United States Army; Professor of Otolaryngology and Bronchoesophagology, Center for Advanced Technology and International Health, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke’s Medical Center, 600 South Paulina, Suite 524, Chicago, Illinois 60612-3832
Foreword

These two volumes of the *Textbook of Military Medicine* address medical ethics within a military context, a heretofore essentially unexplored field. Military medical care is practiced across a wide spectrum of settings, ranging from garrison medicine, through deployments for Operations Other Than War (OOTW), and extending to massive deployments of personnel and materiel in a large-scale conventional war. Within a peacetime garrison setting, military medical ethics has many similarities to civilian medical ethics and usually uses the same decision-making processes. It is similar in that the patient–physician relationship is generally the same, as are the goals of therapy. Patient autonomy takes priority in clinical decisions. However, the very nature of the military mission, especially when it involves deployment or combat, precludes military medical ethics from being identical to civilian medical ethics. Within military medicine, there is a significant dichotomy between medicine’s healing and the military’s injuring. Conflicts can arise between duties to the patient and to the command structure. The battlefield introduces totally unique stressors and criteria for decision making. These differences demonstrate the need for these two volumes and their exploration will be its primary emphasis.

The study and discussion of military medical ethics is inherently controversial and troubling. Those who serve in the armed services understand the complexities and problems that the military mission can introduce to the delivery of effective medical healthcare. For instance, rarely does the issue of national security play a role in the day-to-day medical decisions in a civilian setting. The military, however, as the sentry and defender of the nation, is tasked with maintaining security. Survival of the nation can be a powerful driving force behind medical decisions, whether they are correct, just, or legal. One need look no further in our own past than the recently revealed radiation experiments from the Cold War era to understand this. Certainly the lessons to be learned from the perversion of medicine in Germany and Japan, both before and during World War II, are ones to be carefully examined and never forgotten. We constantly strive to remember those lessons, to learn from them, and to attempt to ensure that we do not repeat the travesties of the past. It is all too easy to look at others’ sins and be smug in our own virtue. While controversy is seldom comfortable, it should always be instructive. An excellent organization is willing to publicly examine and discuss its mistakes and to learn from them. *Military Medical Ethics* is offered in that spirit. These volumes may offend. They may stir emotions. They are intended to illuminate. If we cannot bear to look at past mistakes, particularly when they are ours, we cannot learn from them and therefore we cannot prevent them in the future.

I strongly encourage all military medical officers, commanders, and others involved in ethical decision making in medicine study these two volumes. Examine your responses and analyze your decision-making processes. Those who are willing to give the supreme sacrifice in the service of their country are entitled to nothing less than the best ethical decisions made in providing superior medical care to them and their families.

Lieutenant General James B. Peake
The Surgeon General
US Army

Washington, DC
April 2003
Preface

Volume I has discussed the separate fields of medical ethics and military ethics, as well as the synthesis of the two fields in the discussion of profession of the military physician. Volume II continues this discussion by noting that medical ethics in the military is more than just the mere combining of the ethics of the two professions in the persona of the military physician. The underlying tension generated by mixed agency will permeate the chapters in this volume. This tension emerges most clearly when caring for casualties of combat. As the chapter on battlefield medical ethics so aptly describes, the pace and chaos of the battlefield put physicians in situations of making immediate life and death decisions. Furthermore, the practice of medicine in this ferocious environment requires professional military medical training. The lack of resources—whether time, personnel, equipment, supplies, or safety—thrusts the military physician into situations so hostile that his skills, morality, and ethics can all be challenged. This environment is one that his civilian colleagues are likely to never experience, and thus are likely to never fully understand or appreciate. But military physicians know, even if they have not yet cared for combat casualties, that doing so is the apex of their careers—what they have prepared to do, and what they are willing to sacrifice even their own lives in order to do. Thus it is not an exaggeration to say that the battlefield is the crucible of military medical ethics.

Medicine in the service of the State, however, can be seductive and corruptive. We offer four chapters detailing several examples in which unethical decisions were made under the pressure of national security issues. The first reviews the already well-documented crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi regime and punished by the Nuremberg Tribunal. The Nazi doctors were not forced into evil; many freely chose it. The next two chapters (one on the hypothermia experiments at Dachau and the other on the biomedical research programs of the Japanese during the same era) demonstrate the widespread corruption of medical ethics when medicine in the service of the state went without challenge. Some of these transgressions were prosecuted; others were not. The fourth chapter in this discussion concerns American covert and deceptive medical research during the Cold War era. Some may blanche at the inclusion of a chapter on American misdeeds in the same section that chronicles the horrors of the German and Japanese death camps. While American research efforts were not as malevolent or extensive as those of other countries, they nonetheless violated the ethic underlying the patient–physician relationship—“firstly, do no harm.”

The four chapters that comprise the discussion of medicine in the service of the state are followed by two chapters that examine the issues of medical research during that era, and bring it forward through the history of military medical research. Although the chapters have a certain historical flavor, inasmuch as they acknowledge the misdeeds of the past, they also describe how these research programs evolved. In their evolution we see a turn away from pursuing whatever was necessary to protect the country, even if it was at the expense of individuals, toward ensuring ethical research. Thus, the theme for these two chapters is very straightforward: Medical research in the military is carefully controlled to protect the rights of individuals, while ethically pursuing the knowledge necessary to protect the health of service members and thus to support the military mission. The second of the two chapters has, as attachments, several of the most important documents pertaining to the ethical conduct of research, including The Belmont Report.

Medicine in the military is practiced in a variety of contexts, with a variety of patients, all of which necessitates an understanding of the ethics of patient healthcare in a diverse world. Just as there are a variety of patients (including family members and veterans), there are also a variety of healthcare professionals who comprise the healthcare team. Nursing, in particular, addresses the individuality of patients and functions as a bridge between the needs of the patient and the services of the physician. Chaplains are another key component in the healthcare team, for they bring with them an understanding of the spiritual needs of patients as they confront what can be life-altering events or illnesses. Their ability to understand social and cultural differences of patients is particularly valuable in an increasingly diverse military population that also deploys to other cultures to offer assistance.

Medicine in the military is influenced by the society—its ethics, customs, and laws—that it seeks to protect. This societal influence is most apparent as it relates to medicine in the military and the care of its beneficiaries. Military medicine in combat is governed by the Geneva Conventions. These specify the
rights and responsibilities of healthcare professionals and injured or captured combatants.

As the mission of the military continues to evolve, so, too, does the role of military medicine, especially in operations other than war. We present two chapters dealing with the most prevalent forms of military medical assistance to other nations. These missions can, at the same time, be both inspiring and frustrating to those tasked to carry them out. Understanding the ethic of military medicine, especially in these austere environments, is of benefit to all participants to help them navigate through the many obstacles that can be found in unfamiliar surroundings. Not only will military missions evolve; military medicine will evolve as well with the development of new technologies for treating military personnel. Without an adequate appreciation of military medical ethics, some may find these new technologies so tantalizing that the basics (as they have been presented in these volumes) of medical ethics—autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice—may be set aside.

What, then, is the military physician? What have we concluded about this professional in this exposition of military medical ethics? We can state it simply: We believe that the military physician is first and foremost a physician, and secondarily an officer. Yes, the physician is a uniformed service member and is subject to the same rules and regulations, as well as loss of autonomy, as other service members. But most of the time military physicians primarily serve as physicians caring for individual service members. These service members understand that sometimes physicians will have to put the needs of the individual aside for the needs of the mission, but troops must also remain confident that their doctors will do that only when absolutely necessary.

The editors intend these volumes to challenge the reader to examine his profession—both medicine and military—and begin to critically evaluate the position he will take on ethically challenging issues. There is a rich history of military medicine that includes examples of both good and evil. Our intention is for today’s military physician to learn from past errors, to live up to the excellent models of the past, and to grow into the future. Military medicine is a moral profession, but we must be vigilant to guard against challenges that threaten this.

Colonel (Retired) Thomas E. Beam
Formerly Director, The Borden Institute
US Army

Washington, DC
April 2003
The current medical system to support the U.S. Army at war is a continuum from the forward line of troops through the continental United States; it serves as a primary source of trained replacements during the early stages of a major conflict. The system is designed to optimize the return to duty of the maximum number of trained combat soldiers at the lowest possible level. Far-forward stabilization helps to maintain the physiology of injured soldiers who are unlikely to return to duty and allows for their rapid evacuation from the battlefield without needless sacrifice of life or function.