



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

BIOETHICAL ISSUES IN A MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY

(16th January 1998)

abstract

The NBC deals with the bioethical issues which arise from the coexistence of a plurality of ethnic groups in the same territory with particular reference to the impact of immigration in the context of health, therapy and care. The opinion emphasises how in a multiethnic society the first guiding principle for bioethical reflection and practice is that of respect for the human being, regardless of cultural or ethnic affiliation. It is hoped that the principle of equality is shared by all cultures. This same principle should be integrated with the principle of difference, that is, respect for the specificity of each culture.

It rejects on the one hand the assimilation approach (whereby equality means the uniformity of each culture to the culture considered dominant) and on the other the separatist approach (whereby difference means protection of the specificity of each culture), and proposes integration of both principles (equality and difference) in the light of recognition of common values, of which the first is the dignity of every human being and the second the belonging to a State, and more generally to a democratic political community. The NBC focuses on non-discrimination regarding access to the social and health services for prevention, diagnosis and treatment which should be guaranteed to all, Italians and foreigners alike, even if illegal or irregular immigrants. It draws attention to the obligation to guarantee the right to health and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which prescribe to assist the weak and needy.

In the scope of the relationship between health professional and patient, the principle of respecting the dignity of every man and his specific culture is emphasised, provided that it does not conflict with the principles of democracy and the secularism of the State. For this reason, it is the opinion of the NBC that, the requests to proceed with mutilations and lesions of the body for non-therapeutic purposes, should not be granted.

The NBC believes that the formation of personnel involved in health care and the social services is fundamental, in order to promote bioethical awareness orientated towards an understanding of different cultures and foster a dynamic meta-cultural relationship capable of accelerating the gradual and sure process of assimilation that constitutes the only hope for peaceful coexistence.