



The Canadian Press

National News, Thursday, October 5, 2006

Fight brewing over planned Jehovah's Witness article by Calgary writer

The Canadian Press

EDMONTON (CP) - A fight is brewing over a planned article for a medical journal about bio-ethics and the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses.

A group of more than a dozen medical, legal and religious practitioners is circulating a letter of protest, accusing the religious sect of trying to "bully" the Ottawa-based journal Paediatrics & Child Health out of publishing the article.

Todd Van Vliet, a formal civil litigator whose name is on the letter, said scholars need the right to speak "even if sometimes it's hard for us to hear what scholars have to say."

Zenon Bodnaruk, director of clinical affairs at an Ontario Jehovah's Witness hospital information service, said he wrote to the journal after learning about the article, set to run in the January 2007 edition.

"I was concerned that (the co-author) had a bias that I was concerned may not have been disclosed to the editor," he said Wednesday.

Neither Van Vliet nor Bodnaruk have read the article, titled "Jehovah's Witnesses and Paediatric Emergencies."

But Bodnaruk said he was concerned because of a newspaper piece written last year by the pending article's co-author, Juliet Guichon, a senior associate in the office of medial bio-ethics at the University of Calgary.

In that piece, Guichon argued a judge made the right call to have a 14-year-old girl subjected to chemotherapy and a **blood transfusion**, contrary to her Jehovah's Witness family's beliefs.

Guichon said she has also helped a man find a lawyer who was taking on the religious sect over a similar case.

"This is my job, to research and write articles on bio-ethics and often the articles generate controversy," Guichon said Wednesday.

Jehovah's Witnesses oppose transfusions because they interpret certain passages of the Bible as forbidding the ingestion of blood.

A 15-year-old Jehovah's Witness in Winnipeg has been fighting in court for the right to refuse transfusions to treat her Crohn's disease.

In 2002, 17-year-old Bethany Hughes of Calgary died of leukemia despite receiving dozens of blood transfusions against her wishes.

(Edmonton Sun)

Category: News

Subject(s) - The Canadian Press : RELIGION; MEDIA; HEALTH

Hour of publication: 24:4

Length: Short, 271 words

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Doc. : news·20061005·CP·23233

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