



The Catholic Health Association of Canada

UPDATE
on the March 2004 Papal Address Regarding
LIFE SUSTAINING TREATMENT AND THE VEGETATIVE STATE

September 2004

In March 2004, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II gave an address at an International Congress on the topic of life-sustaining treatment and the vegetative state. In response to questions raised by some members about the interpretation and practical implications of the pope's statement, the CHAC, in consultation with Most Rev. James Wingle, the representative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) on the CHAC board of directors, prepared and distributed a statement to members.

At that time the CHAC indicated there was a need for ethicists, bishops, and Catholic health care providers to engage in a discussion to seek a proper and precise understanding of the meaning, intent and application of the Holy Father's address. The CHAC also informed its members that it would monitor the discussion about the pope's statement, and advise members of developments that may affect patient care.

Since issuing the CHAC statement a number of articles have been written on the subject. The CHAC has developed a page on its website which presents resources on the subject that may be of interest to members. The list includes:

- a memo to institutional members of the Catholic Health Association of Saskatchewan on the papal instruction by Mark Miller, CSsR;
- reflections from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute; and
- an essay by Thomas A. Shannon and James Walter entitled "Implications of the Papal Allocution on Feeding Tubes" (*Hastings Centre Report*).

The CHAC will continue to monitor and advise members concerning developments on this issue.

With respect to patient care decisions, the *Health Ethics Guide*(2000), produced by the CHAC and approved by the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, is the standard in Canada for ethical decision making related to end-of-life care and artificially administered nutrition and hydration.

To review the resources available on this subject on the CHAC website click on the following link: www.chac.ca/members/papal_address_04/index.html