

The Hans Schwager Award for Clinical Ethics is given to honor a man who had a rather seminal role in the establishment of the clinical ethics and consultation conference series and who was an early advocate for and supporter of clinical ethics.

Professor Schwager was born in Bunzlau, Silesia in 1929. He studied philosophy and theology at Erlangen, Heidelberg and Muenster, earning his PhD in theology in 1959. He taught for many years and was appointed in 1973 as a member of the Board of Directors of the Bethel Foundation with the main responsibility for primary, secondary, and vocational schools especially for young adults with epilepsy.

From 1982 through 1999, he served on the Board of Trustees of the Bethel Foundation for epilepsy and he also directed a national epilepsy information center. During this time, he was also instrumental in establishing the first epilepsy surgery program in Europe, which was established in collaboration with the Cleveland Clinic, the pioneering center for epilepsy surgery in the US. During this time he confronted the many clinical ethics issues associated with the management and treatment of epilepsy.

I met Hans in 1999 when he asked me to host a visit by a group of clinical leaders from Bethel to the Department of Bioethics at the Cleveland Clinic, where I was chair. The goal was to observe the various clinical ethics programs and to advise them about the establishment of such services at Gilead Hospital in Bielefeld, Germany. In 2000 I was invited to visit Bielefeld to continue our conversations and to deliver a series of workshops. At one of these, I met Stella Reiter-Theil, who co-presented with me. Hans challenged us at this meeting in September 2000 to organize a series of workshops/conferences with the goal of developing clinical ethics and ethics consultation in Germany and Europe generally. Stimulated by Hans, Professor Reiter-Theil and I explored the feasibility of such a project. We saw not only a growing interest in and development of clinical ethics in the form of health care institution ethics committees and ethics consultation services around the world, the need for education and capacity development for this emerging field, but also the danger of fracturing the field along the lines of competing programs and professional societies. We settled on a plan for a biennial series of conferences on clinical ethics and consultation, the International Conferences on Clinical Ethics and Consultation (ICCEC), that would have an independent status.

Unfortunately, Hans could not attend the first meeting in Cleveland in 2003 and he died before the second ICCEC, which was held in Basel in 2005. Despite our initial trepidation about whether the nascent field of clinical ethics could sustain a series of conferences that melded the practical and clinical with the theoretical and scholarly, response to these meetings has been overwhelmingly positive. These meetings have stimulated research and scholarship in clinical ethics and have provided a truly international forum for individuals and programs in clinical ethics to network, share resources, and develop collaborative arrangements.

The Hans Joachim Schwager Award in Clinical Ethics is meant to honor the memory of Hans' contribution to the develop of clinical ethics and spur a collegial spirit of service and innovation that he exemplified in his own life in developing services to support patients, families, and health professionals as they confront difficult ethical and value concerns in the course of patient care.

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