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HEALTH FACILITIES &
SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

April 18, 2011

Mike Constantino
Supervisor, Project Review Section
Illinois Health Facilities & Service Review Board
525 West Jefferson Street (2nd Floor)
Springfield, Illinois 62761

Dear Mr. Constantino:

I was unable to speak at the public hearing this morning because of a crowded roster and my hospital duties, which required that I leave Oak Forest by noon. However, I am enclosing a written statement.

This same statement was presented to the Cook County Health and Hospitals System Board of Directors at their monthly meeting in January. The concerns expressed at that time are no less intense three months later, Mr. Foley's reassurances notwithstanding. Decisions driven by scarce resources can lead to devastating results, as history has shown.

Thanks you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Richard J. David, M.D.
Attending Neonatologist
John Stroger Hospital of Cook County
Professor of Pediatrics
University of Illinois at Chicago

Testimony by Richard David, MD

Health and Hospitals System Board Meeting, January 28, 2011

I am speaking today as a member of the medical profession with growing concerns based on 20th century history. A very disturbing episode in the history of medicine keeps coming to mind as I witness the events unfolding in our public health system today.

Dr. Leo Alexander, a Boston neurologist and psychiatrist, was called as a special expert witness to testify before the Nuremberg tribunal investigating the actions of German physicians during World War II. In 1949 he published a summary of his testimony in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He described how the most advanced medical profession in the world was transformed into an appendage of the militarized state, how it lost touch with its mission to care for the sick and infirm. Embracing the politics of the day with patriotic fervor, doctors and other health professionals actively organized a program that was referred to as euthanasia.

In the opening paragraph of his *NEJM* article Dr Alexander describes “a rapid decline in standards of professional ethics. Medical science in Nazi Germany collaborated ... in the following enterprises: the mass extermination of the chronically sick in the interest of saving ‘useless’ expenses to the community as a whole; [and] the mass extermination of those considered socially disturbing or racially and ideologically unwanted...”

He goes on to describe the system: “The decision regarding which patients should be killed was made entirely on the basis of [limited] information by expert consultants.... These consultants never saw the patients themselves. ... [Q]uestionnaires were collected by a ‘Realm's Work Committee of Institutions for Cure and Care.’ ... The ‘Charitable Transport Company for the Sick’ transported patients to the killing centers, and the ‘Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care’ was in charge of collecting the cost of the killings from the relatives, without, however, informing them what the charges were for; in the death certificates the cause of death was falsified.”

When the County of Cook arranges transportation of undocumented patients to home countries where we know they will not receive the treatments that are keeping them alive, I submit that that policy should be referred to as administrative euthanasia. When patients on ventilators are forced to move to nursing homes with none of the resources or expertise needed to care for them properly and a track record of extremely high mortality, that, too, should be labeled administrative euthanasia.

Dr. Alexander concluded, “Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived.”

We must not allow the distorted values of that dark period in human history to direct policy in this health system. “Vision 2015” will be no less a euphemism than the “Charitable Transport Company for the Sick” should those twisted ideas prevail in our time .

Alexander, L. Medical science under dictatorship. *New England Journal of Medicine*, July 14, 1949.