

## ***Virtual Mentor***

American Medical Association Journal of Ethics  
May 2000, Volume 2, Number 5: 39.

### **IN THE LITERATURE**

#### **Defining Futility?**

Faith Lagay, PhD

**Youngner SJ. Who defines futility? *JAMA*. 1988;260(14):2094-2095.**

#### **Questions for Discussion**

Many patients and their families take "futility" to be synonymous with deliberately failing to provide appropriate care. But just because aggressive treatment is discontinued, or is not elevated, does not mean that appropriate treatment, consistent with the standard of care, is not being given to the patient.

1. Is there a definition of the term that can move beyond the confusion and help physicians and patients alike to achieve a mutual understanding of treatments that are in patients' best interests?
2. Or should we simply cease to use "futility"? Explain.

Faith Lagay, PhD is managing editor in of *Virtual Mentor*.

*The viewpoints expressed on this site are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.*

Copyright 2000 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.