

# EDITORIAL

## **The evolution of medicine over the course of the second half of the 20th century**

led to a situation in which technical progress and advances in the treatment of illnesses have increasingly raised questions of an ethical nature. What is best for the patient in each case? Is it right to pursue all the technically possible treatments? How should one act when a treatment, because of its exorbitant cost, cannot be made available to all patients in a society? These and many other issues gave rise to the emergence of bioethics: ethical reflection applied to the biomedical sciences. It is a field involving a far-reaching dialogue among many disciplines, since this crossroads of knowledge is the meeting point for biomedical and biological science, the humanities (philosophy, ethics, theology, law) and also the social sciences, since medicine covers the conceptual ambits of sociology, economics and political science.

## **The evolution of this discipline does, however, have a huge impact on the**

relationship between doctor and patient. The professional environment must ensure that patients know they are being treated with respect. Bioethics is in essence an approach or a mentality that is applied when treating patients. This is the point stressed by Núria Terribas, of the Borja Bioethics Institute: "if we do not observe such respect and attempt to impose our own judgement and value system, we are not acting with a bioethics mentality which should be based on dialogue and the quest for consensus, meaning that patients may feel they have not been properly tended to and that their rights have been violated".

## **Dialogue, consensus, violation of rights... Because it is by no means only medical**

advances which raise issues. Often the question arises from the new context in which the healthcare relationship takes place: the pluralism of values in a complex society. In the words of Dr Benjamín Herreros, "problems of clinical ethics have increased exponentially since the liberal revolution was extended to medicine, with the *de facto* recognition (not only in law) that patients have the right to decide as to their health". An open and tolerant society, marked by a pluralism of values, raises ever more questions. This necessarily calls for specific training for health professionals. Meanwhile, patients and their relatives when confronted with ethical issues such as the meaning of life, the meaning of care, scientific progress and its limits etc., reflect on these and this in turn raises among them many questions that need answers.

## **These debates have a social dimension and impact on the guiding principles of**

healthcare models, hence the fact that the Espriu Foundation gives them a lot of consideration. It was at a General Assembly of the ASISA-Lavinia co-operative, at the proposal of a representative from Guipuzcoa in the Basque Country, that work began a year ago to set up a Bioethics and Healthcare Law Committee. As its president, Dr María Tormo, explains, "the committee operates as a consultancy for Lavinia doctors, in other words the co-operative members, and also for doctors and other healthcare staff belonging to the organisation's medical lists. [...] We aim to make it a practical consultancy, genuinely dealing with the issues which concern professionals in their daily tasks. [...] Bioethics must, however, provide a response within the existing legal framework".