



The myth of neutrality

The agenda behind 'value-free' sex education

Review by **Philippa Taylor**
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The Department for Education has been consulting on draft guidance for schools on Relationships Education (RE) at primary school and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at secondary school.¹

Sex education policy has been, and still is, largely driven by concerns about teenage pregnancy, STIs and the adequacy of 'consent'. Advice given on RSE by leading campaigners² is devoid of references to morality, marriage or family life and fidelity as the context for sex. This approach presumes that a young person can shape their own morality without being given any social values or world view to reason and act within.

The weakness of a 'value-free' approach that gives no moral guidance on saying 'no' to sexual activity is that choice then becomes the prime value, irrespective of what the choice actually is. A comment by a school nurse³ illustrates this well: 'I don't consider I've failed if a girl gets pregnant as long as she's got pregnant because she knew where advice was and chose not to access it'.

Dr Olwyn Mark warns that reducing decision-making to just 'consent' in effect socialises and educates young people to sleep with strangers.⁴ This cannot be in the best

interests of youngsters who are left rudderless. We have evidence now that current sex education programmes do not produce the results they aim for.

A 2016 Cochrane study^{5,6} found that current sex education programmes do not reduce pregnancy and STIs among the young. In fact, they have no effect on adolescent pregnancy and STI rates. At the same time, STI rates have actually risen,⁷ along with sexual harassment, sexting and online pornography.⁸ A BMJ editorial by Dr Stammers draws similar conclusions on sex education policies.⁹ Recent US research found that: '...comprehensive sex education has essentially been ineffective in US school classrooms and has produced a concerning number of negative outcomes.'¹⁰

Children's greatest need in RSE is not to reduce morality to consent, but is guidance in developing holistic relational values, healthy emotional development and moral teaching on the significance of sexual relationships. Dr Mark suggests they also need to be taught: 'the virtues of Christian love and chastity, dispositions which can enrich the moral discourse of SRE.'

To those fearful of speaking Christian values, she adds: 'The presumption that a religious voice is any less valid or rational

within policy reasoning and formulation than, say, a naturalistic world view position is also a flawed position that must be challenged.'¹¹

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World Medical Association under pressure

Moves to weaken ethical stance challenged by Christian doctors

Review by **Steve Fouch**
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When the World Medical Association (WMA) was formed in the 1940s, it was as an ethical bulwark against the extremes of Nazi medicine. It has subsequently maintained a strong support for freedom of conscience and active opposition to euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.¹

However, at the WMA General Assembly in early October in Reykjavik, two motions were put forward that challenged this. The first was a move to effectively weaken its stance on conscientious objection to abortion by changing some key wording in its statement on abortion.² The second was a move brought forward by the Canadian and Royal Dutch Medical Associations (CMA and RDMA) to remove its opposition to assisted dying.³

The former came as part of a routine re-evaluation of its position statement, and was challenged by CMF's global umbrella body, the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) in an open letter calling on the General Assembly to not loosen its wording around protection of conscience.⁴ Sadly, the clause was amended as originally proposed.⁵

However, in a strange turnaround of events, the CMA withdrew its proposal on assisted dying, and then resigned its membership of the WMA, citing the apparent plagiarism of large sections of the new Director General's acceptance speech to the General Assembly.⁶ In the meantime, the German delegation offered a 'compromise' resolution, which was roundly opposed, but is to be further considered by the WMA in spring 2019.⁷

So, while freedom of conscience has yet again been subtly eroded, for now at least the global medical community has not weakened its opposition to all forms of euthanasia.

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