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# NANCY RHODEN: BRIDGING THE DISCIPLINES OF LAW, MEDICINE, AND ETHICS

WATSON A. BOWES, JR., M.D.†

With the death of Professor Nancy Rhoden, the Medical School has lost a valuable faculty member, the Departments of Pediatrics and Obstetrics & Gynecology have lost a valuable colleague, and the medical students have lost a brilliant teacher.

She taught in a quiet, stimulating, Socratic way, challenging each position with sympathy, understanding, and immaculately clear thinking. Although she might personally disagree heartily with another's position, she was always willing to keep a completely open mind in the debate and to learn as she taught. Her own positions were arrived at with meticulous and exhaustive review of all the data and an analysis of every possible way of viewing the problem. Her several articles on some of the most difficult topics in perinatal ethics contain the most precise reasoning and in-depth analyses available on these issues. She told me on one occasion that it required approximately a year of research, analysis, writing, and rewriting to complete each of these essays.

For a period of eighteen months, when her health permitted it, we had the good fortune at the medical school to join in a monthly discussion moderated by Professor Rhoden about case presentations that involved difficult perinatal ethical issues. Not once did she express what she thought was the proper solution to an ethical dilemma. Rather, she asked other questions, pointed out new ways of thinking about the problem, challenged stereotypic points of view, and always shed new light on the topic. Medical students, residents, senior faculty, social workers, and many others always left these conferences with new insights and a refreshing capability for addressing similar situations in the future. That was the brilliance of her teaching.

Although her professional education was in law, her discussions and her contributions to the literature demonstrated an enormous knowledge about the medical topics she addressed. Her scholarship was both deep and wide.

While not a close personal friend of Nancy Rhoden, I did enjoy an all-too-brief, warm professional relationship with this remarkable young woman. I was saddened, as were all her friends and colleagues, by her increasing physical disability. Not infrequently, she would walk painfully on two crutches to our perinatal ethics conference at the medical school. It would have been a great

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blessing if her suffering could have been relieved. That it was not, and that it took so great a toll, is another of the unfathomable mysteries of this life.