

Alcor News Bulletin

Number 15: August 13th, 2003

Renewed Ted Williams Controversy: An Interim Response

Earlier this year Alcor News reported that we hired Larry Johnson, a nationally certified paramedic, to manage our standby/transport work and emergency response capability. Larry came to us with excellent references and was actively helpful in implementing a major revision of our meds kits. He participated in our March training sessions and also helped to train paramedics in Phoenix and Florida. Larry became an Alcor member and made no secret of this. He told a CBS TV news team from Los Angeles that he had always wanted to see the future, and he seemed to feel that cryonics would help him to get there.

In two cases, Larry made a decisive difference by giving emergency guidance over the phone. He helped to minimize ischemic damage and made a radical difference to the condition of the cryopatients in these cases. We were impressed by his assistance generally, and were glad to have him at Alcor.

Unfortunately Larry seemed to feel unhappy with some aspects of Alcor. He had come to us from a very large, well-funded paramedic facility where he had been better compensated. Apparently he nursed a grudge to such an extent that he provided a reporter at Sports Illustrated with confidential information which seemed calculated to damage Alcor as much as possible. The news item was picked up by The Associated Press and triggered reports from sources such as The New York Times and The Arizona Republic.

We were astonished and dismayed that a nationally certified paramedic would behave in such a way, without any significant provocation that we are aware of. We had done everything we could to get to know Larry and verify that he was an ethical person whom we could trust.

Fortunately Alcor has accumulated some redundancy among its field team members during the past year. We can still respond well in an emergency. In the meantime, in reply to some of Larry Johnson's allegations, we are providing the news media with information explaining that our procedures are formulated to minimize damage, not create it.

In particular, the damage caused by fracturing when a vitrified cryopatient is cooled to liquid-nitrogen temperature is small compared with the cellular damage that used to occur using glycerol as a cryoprotectant. While we won't be entirely happy until the day when we achieve zero-damage cryopreservation, we are absolutely convinced that repair of simple fractures will be easy compared with the reconstruction of cellular debris that used to be caused by ice formation.

Also, when we use a perforator (a standard medical tool) in

our operating room to create two small burr holes in the skull, this is a precaution enabling us to inspect the surface of the brain during cryoprotective perfusion. Observation of the brain is a safety measure to reduce the risk of edema. Here again, we tolerate a small amount of damage in the interests of avoiding much greater damage. (A burr hole can be repaired even with today's medicine.)

Finally we must emphasize, contrary to news reports, that Alcor has never collected "DNA samples" from its cryopatients. Obviously Alcor has no need to collect "DNA samples," since a neuropatient already contains billions of DNA molecules. We may collect venous effluent samples during the perfusion of a cryopatient, but the purpose of these samples is to evaluate blood chemistry via standard lab tests.

So far as we can tell, Larry Johnson took some of Alcor's property away with him when he disappeared without warning at the end of the weekend of August 9th and 10th. During the preceding weeks he recorded conversations with Alcor employees without notifying them or seeking their permission, and he probably viewed confidential documents. We will be taking appropriate action. Alcor must make a clear statement that it will not be intimidated by the threat of bad press and will not tolerate gross violations of its standard nondisclosure agreement by employees or ex-employees.

We will provide additional updates when we have any significant news to report. Currently we have been unable to reach Larry Johnson via phone or email, despite repeated attempts. If he has any statement to make regarding our description of what we believe he did, we invite his response.

Alcor News is written primarily by Charles Platt.
Contents are copyright 2003 by Alcor
Foundation but permission is granted to reprint any whole
news item, so long as Alcor is credited as the source and
the reprint includes our URL at <http://www.alcornews.org>.