

needs counselling, and others accuse him of being a coward and opting for the easy way out. Before a crucial hearing at his home, Ethan's mother, Isabel, arrives to see him and offer support for his petition. Finally, Ethan gets his chance to explain to the judge, his decision to die. He compares his life to being locked in a box, unable to move, but wanting to do so.

For me, there were several riveting moments in this film, particularly, the death of Ethan's mother. Ethan is lying in his bed and his mother's coffin is placed next to him. It is a very powerful visual, suggesting the similarity of Ethan's position., You feel deeply sorry for him, not even being able to touch his mother for the last time. Another memorable scene shows Omar, a young man to whom Ethan agrees to pass on his legacy, graduate as a magician with flying colours. Ethan asks him to pull a piece of cloth from under him and he unfolds yards and yards of white cloth. Omar is as excited as a child.

Ethan is happy just watching the joy on Omar's face, symbolic of the gift of magic Ethan has given Omar, with its endless possibilities.

Intrigue, anxiety, anguish and romance- all come across so well. A heart-wrenchingly beautiful soundtrack and tantalising cinematography capture the essence of the film. One small criticism would be about the ending, with a party scene.. I would have preferred a quiet close to the film, but it dragged on for an additional 20 minutes. Perhaps the intention is to make the audience feel comfortable with the hero's death.,tThe problem is that, as a society, we are so uncomfortable at the thought of anyone wanting to die, that we have to sugarcoat it. So we call it mercy killing.

Euthanasia evokes powerful emotions in both its advocates and adversaries. I do hope that both will see this film as opening the door to a subject that has been neglected for far too long.

## MEDIA REVIEW

### The "morning after" pill: misleading messages

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Ever since emergency contraceptives (ECs) have received a go ahead in the Indian pharmaceutical market, myriad advertisements featuring ECs have hit television, the internet and the print media. Out of the various EC advertisements, this particular ad is especially appalling as it sends out entirely misleading messages.

The minute-long ad starts with the wife accusing the husband of having phoned another woman on the morning of their first anniversary. The husband replies that she was just his office colleague. The wife wants to be reassured that her husband still loves her and tells him that she doesn't want anything to come between them. He reassures her and shows her a condom pack and suggests that they should celebrate their anniversary. The wife looks outraged and reminds him that she doesn't want "anything" to come between them. Then she opens a drawer and shows him a "feminine utility pack" which contains an emergency contraceptive - L pill. The next visual shows the happy-looking couple, with a background voice saying "L pill, emergency contraceptive, it's beyond pregnancy".

I object to this ad on a number of grounds. First, the theme that runs through the ad is itself very misleading. It conveys the message that emergency contraceptive pills can be used as regular contraceptives, essentially in place of condoms. The word "emergency" has been overlooked and after having

seen the ad, it seems as if the makers want ECs to be used as a regular method of contraception. There is not much research available on the adverse effects of ECs on prolonged use, but there are definite immediate side effects like nausea, vomiting, headache, diarrhoea, bleeding between menstrual periods (spotting), weight gain, acne, stomach cramps, rash, swelling or bloating, skin spots and breast tenderness, etc. Therefore one should not ignore the harmful effects these pills could have on the body, if they were used as casually as this ad intends to convey.

My second objection to this ad is that it rides on the common myth that a condom is only for preventing pregnancy, and reinforces it. It blatantly undermines the importance of using a condom as a way of staving off sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, especially among the young and the less aware. It weakens the efforts of all those who have steadfastly been working to promote the use of condoms as a way of preventing HIV. "Wanting nothing to come between two partners" is as trivial as an excuse could get to start using emergency contraceptives.

Thirdly, this ad makes no effort to specify the efficacy of the pills, their side effects and the fact that they do not give protection from STDs. These are over-the-counter drugs, needing no prescription, so all the information people get

about these drugs is through advertisements. The success rate of the ECs is between 70 and 90% when had within 72 hours of unprotected sex, whereas the success rate of male condoms is about 98% when used correctly. The ad erroneously suggests that pregnancy can be averted with ECs just as well as it can with condoms. Such irresponsible marketing of ECs may end up having the opposite effect of what might have been intended.

To sum up, the ad is seriously flawed and in effect, it does not fall within the realm of ethical and responsible advertising. The media is a great source of knowledge for all sorts of

people, young and old, smart and ignorant, secure and vulnerable. The interests of the beneficiaries and potential harms and benefits to them must be kept in mind while designing advertisements, especially if they concern people's health. Women have the right to know the facts about ECs so that they can take informed decisions, so the approach towards the ad must be candid. The ad must neither conceal any information nor be laced with any misleading information. In essence, the advertisement must follow the principles of beneficence and no deception which are essential to ethical practice.

## **Opportunities for internships in ethics**

The Centre for Studies in Ethics and Rights (CSER) was set up in January 2005 by the Anusandhan Trust (AT) to undertake research in ethics and human rights.

CSER is engaged in research and training in ethics and rights and for capacity building of voluntary organisations/NGOs. It organises training programmes in various fields, including research bioethics, clinical ethics and programme management. Our priority areas include professional ethics, research bioethics, public health ethics, development ethics, law, human rights and ethics, comparative ethics, and exploring linkages between the discourses in ethics and rights in the Indian context.

Specific areas in which research is planned and ongoing include ethics in reproductive health research and practice, ethical issues in public health interventional research and clinical trials, poverty and ethics, and ethics in Indian systems of medicine.

CSER faculty members include social scientists, medical professionals, bioethicists and public health practitioners.

CSER offers internships to graduate, postgraduate and doctoral students from academic institutions in medicine, law, social work, social sciences and others who are interested in its areas of study. Faculty at CSER will offer mentorship, and office space will be made available for the intern. The libraries and documentation centres of CSER and CEHAT in Mumbai as well as broadband internet access will be available. Interns will be expected to do a time-bound project or assignment to the satisfaction of CSER faculty, the students and their respective institutions and submit a report towards the end of internship. Certificates of experience will be provided to the students.

For further details please contact Mr Mahendra, administration, CSER, at mahendra.cser@gmail.com or (91 22) 2612 0655.