

Veritas

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University of Miami

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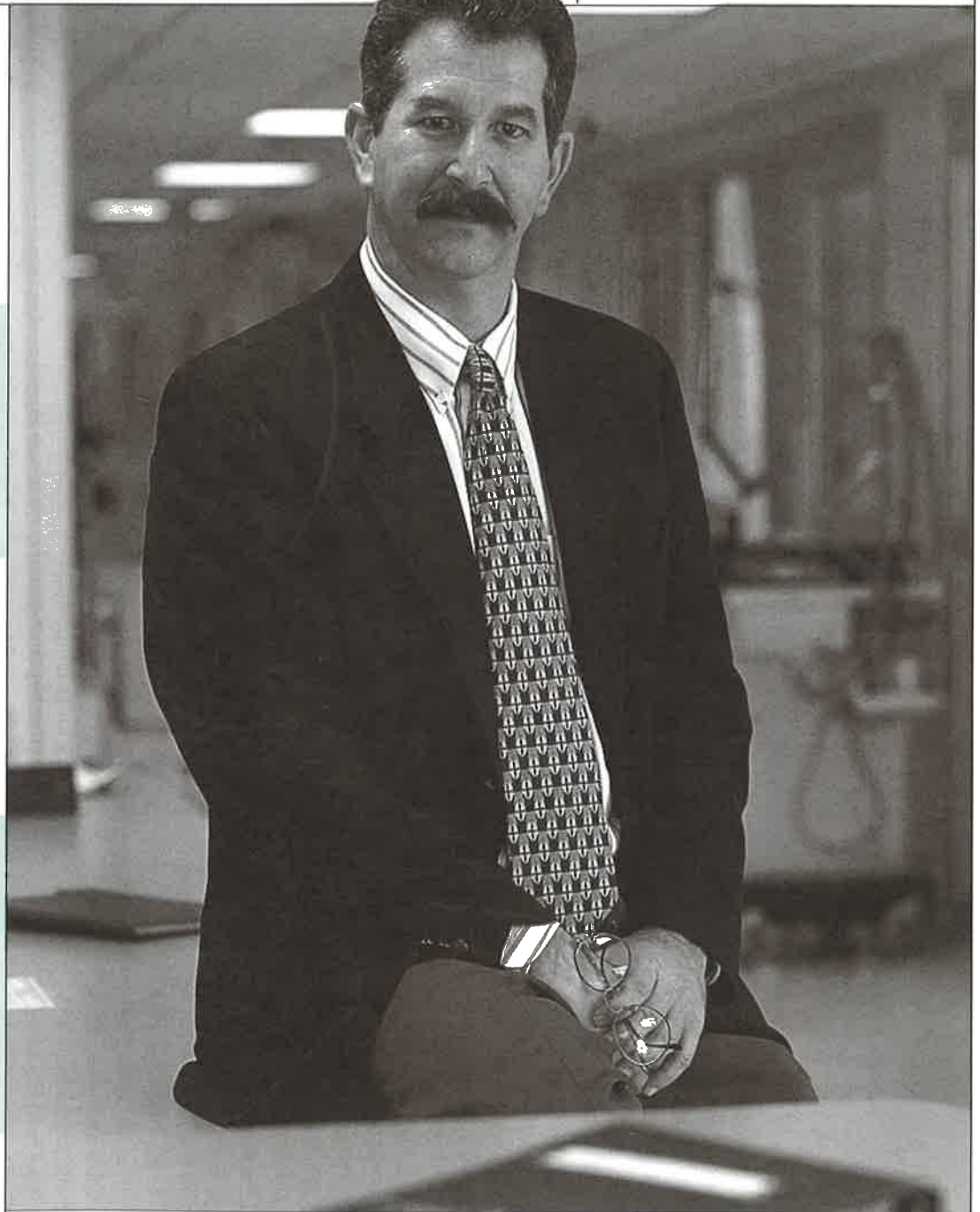
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How far should science push the envelope in its pursuit to rid the world of disease? It is tough questions such as that one that Kenneth Goodman often confronts as director of the University of Miami's Bioethics Program. The program, now in its tenth year, is dedicated to education and research on many of the ethical challenges facing health professionals. See story, page 5.

Ethical pursuits: Kenneth Goodman seeks out the difficult questions

Cancer physicians, transplant surgeons, and cell biology researchers don't have crystal balls in their laboratories or inside their medicine bags.

But through embryonic stem cell research, they are able to predict some of the more promising medical breakthroughs that could someday come true.

Replacing neurons that have died in people with such devastating diseases as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Coaxing stem cells to turn into insulin-producing islet cells to transplant into diabetics. Getting stem cells to

turn into connecting fibers that will restore function to millions of people with spinal cord injury.

But is it ethical to pursue such potentially lifesaving treatments by harvesting stem cells from recently fertilized eggs or pre-embryos created with cloning technology? If you think that's a tough question, try walking in Kenneth Goodman's shoes for a day.

Goodman is founder and director of the University of Miami's Bioethics Program, which is dedicated to education and research on many of the ethical challenges facing health professionals, from public health to end-of-life issues, and from genetics and stem cell research to computers and large data bases. In conjunction with the Program in Business, Government, and Professional

Ethics—codirected by Anita Cava from the Department of Business Law—the interdisciplinary, University-wide initiatives, now in their tenth year, link faculty, researchers, and students on four UM campuses, in the sciences and humanities and across a broad array of policy and social service programs.

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sity-wide program to examine ethics in the professions, beginning with the health professions,” says Goodman. “Many universities have seen the utility of institution-wide ethics programs, and we're one of them. What America's universities are discovering is that this is fertile ground.”

Goodman says many people misinterpret what ethics programs such as the University of Miami's are intended to accomplish.

“Ethics does not consist of trying to teach people to be virtuous,” he says. “At a university, ethics is an area of critical reflection and inquiry. It's where we teach critical thinking. Everybody knows that it's usually wrong to eavesdrop on a phone call or flush a toilet into the lake. But is it appropriate for

companies to monitor employees' e-mail or to put job retention over pollution controls? Deciding whether or not it is requires some critical thinking.”

As director of UM's Bioethics Program, Goodman spends a great deal of



Kenneth Goodman's current research focuses on bioinformatics, which blends issues from computer science, ethics, biology, and public policy.

time on all four University campuses. He holds appointments in the Departments of Medicine, Philosophy, and Epidemiology and Public Health, and in the School of Nursing, teaching courses that examine everything from human subjects research and international policy to end-of-life care and government integrity.

Additionally, the program develops conferences and symposia that attract professionals from around the hemisphere. Extreme Ethics: Unusually Difficult Challenges in Epidemiology and Public Health Research, for example, is an annual fall conference supported by

a grant from the National Institutes of Health. The conference examines such issues as ethics and biostatistics, the social goals of public health research, and ethical issues in occupational and environmental health. The next conference is set for October 18-20.

Goodman's current research includes work on bioinformatics, the use of information technology to acquire, store, manage, share, analyze, represent, and transmit genetic data. This work blends issues from computer science, ethics, biology, and public policy. Goodman says patients are at risk when such information, easily accessible by a myriad of outside sources, is used without adequate oversight.

“Unfortunately humans are very good at discriminating against each other,” says Goodman. “Well, here's a new way to discriminate.”

For the future, UM's ethics programs have their sights set on a new area: environmental ethics. “Interesting ethical issues arise when you try to tell people what they can do with their land and their water, and what responsibilities we have to each other in waste disposal and development. I see more collaborations for us—with schools, with government, and other universities—to raise the profile and utility of applied ethics.”