

# Life and Death in the War Zone

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

**Note:** This program contains graphic medical images and stories involving U.S. soldiers and Iraqi children that may be upsetting to students. Please preview it to determine its appropriateness for your classroom.



NOVA portrays life in two Combat Support Hospitals during the Iraq War.

The program:

- follows the 10th Combat Support Hospital (CSH) from its U.S. base in Colorado to its deployment in the Kuwaiti desert.
- notes that coalition casualties are relatively light at the start of the war due to ceramic body armor worn by soldiers and air supremacy by allied forces.
- portrays life at the 21st CSH posted in the northern Iraq cities of Balad and Mosul.
- shows how a 44-bed CSH—equipped with everything found in a standard hospital—is set up within 72 hours.
- reports the cases of U.S. and Iraqi patients who enter the facility.
- details the 21st CSH treatment guidelines at the time of filming for caring for injured Iraqis—the only Iraqis eligible for care must be in immediate danger of losing life, limb, or eyesight; must be injured by American soldiers; or must be prisoners of war.
- highlights the ethical dilemmas faced by medical personnel who evaluate and refuse care to some injured Iraqis, including small children.
- notes that most American injuries are minor, including scorpion stings, cuts and bruises, and heat-related illnesses.
- concludes with a story about the care provided for and ultimate death of an eight-year-old Iraqi girl who was apparently injured in a U.S. missile attack and was also suffering from malnutrition.

**Taping Rights:** Can be used up to one year after the program is taped off the air.

## BEFORE WATCHING

- 1 Ask students to brainstorm the kinds of medical personnel they think the armed forces employ. What kind of medical support might be needed during a war? What kinds of medical personnel might have been deployed to support troops in Iraq? (A CSH contains many of the same specialists as a stateside hospital, including internists, nurses, dentists, ophthalmologists, gynecologists, surgeons, radiologists, and infectious disease specialists.)
- 2 Organize students into two groups. As they watch, have one group take notes on the 21st CSH guidelines for treating injured Iraqis; have the second group take notes on each patient that came into the CSH and the decisions made regarding the case.

## AFTER WATCHING

- 1 Review students' notes regarding the 21st CSH guidelines for treating Iraqis and the cases that came up during the program. What were the guidelines? In each case, what guidelines and considerations did medical personnel use to make their decisions? What do students think about each of the decisions made?
- 2 Ask students to think of other circumstances in which priorities need to be set for allocation of limited resources (e.g., emergency-room triage, food distribution in areas of famine, medicine allotment in countries experiencing disease outbreaks). What might some of the guiding principles be for these situations?

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Objective

To determine criteria for selecting an organ transplant recipient.

### Materials for each team member

- copy of the “You Be the Judge” student handout

### Procedure

- 1 The medical personnel at the Combat Support Hospital in Iraq used specific criteria to consider which injured Iraqis to treat. In this activity, students will consider what criteria they might use when selecting an organ transplant recipient in this country.
- 2 Organize students into four Transplant Review Board teams and distribute the student handout to each team member. After each team has chosen its lung recipient, discuss the following:
  - What criteria did each team use to select a lung recipient?
  - How did team members decide which criteria were most important?
  - How did students weigh patients who have knowingly abused their bodies, such as cigarette smokers or alcoholics, against individuals who have not engaged in risky behavior? Should this be a guiding factor? Why or why not?
  - Why or why not should the ability to pay—through insurance, Medicaid, or personal funds—affect which patients are selected?
- 3 To conclude, review the American Medical Association’s guidelines for allocation of limited resources in cases such as organ transplantation (see Activity Answer on page 3). What do the students think about the AMA’s recommendations?
- 4 As an extension, have students research and report on guidelines that have been set for allocation of limited resources in other situations, such as food or medical distribution in areas of need.

## STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

The “You Be the Judge” activity aligns with the following National Science Education Standards.

GRADES 5–8

Science Standard G:

### History and Nature of Science

Science as a human endeavor

- Science requires different abilities, depending on such factors as the field of study and type of inquiry. Science is very much a human endeavor, and the work of science relies on basic human qualities, such as reasoning, insight, energy, skill, and creativity—as well as on scientific habits of mind, such as intellectual honesty, tolerance of ambiguity, skepticism, and openness to new ideas.

GRADES 9–12

Science Standard G:

### History and Nature of Science

Science as a human endeavor

- Scientists are influenced by societal, cultural, and personal beliefs and ways of viewing the world. Science is not separate from society but rather science is a part of society.

*Video is required  
for this activity.*

### Classroom Activity Author

Developed by WGBH Educational Outreach staff.

## ACTIVITY ANSWER

Students should sort through each case history to determine which facts are relevant in deciding which of the four patients should be chosen to receive the lung transplant.

According to the American Medical Association's Code of Ethics, decisions regarding the allocation of limited medical resources should only be based on ethically appropriate criteria. These criteria include

- likelihood of benefit
- urgency of need
- change in quality of life
- duration of benefit

In some cases, the amount of resources required for successful treatment is also considered. In terms of judging quality of life, the AMA notes, patients should first be prioritized so that death or extremely poor outcomes are avoided, followed by prioritization according to change in quality of life. In order for these criteria to be ethically relevant, substantial differences among patients must exist; the greater those differences are, the more justified the use of the criteria.

According to AMA guidelines, the individuality of patients and the particulars of individual cases should be respected as much as possible in the decision-making process. In cases where substantial differences do not exist among potential recipients based on defined criteria, some other equal-opportunity method should be used to make final allocation decisions, such as a first-come-first-served approach.

Non-medical criteria that should not be considered when making allocation decisions include

- ability to pay
- age
- social worth
- perceived obstacles to treatment
- patient contribution to illness
- past use of resources

Find the full text of the AMA's Code of Ethics regarding allocation of limited medical resources at

[www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8388.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8388.html)

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**PARK**  
FOUNDATION

 **Sprint**

**Microsoft**

## LINKS AND BOOKS

### Links

NOVA Web Site—Life and Death in the War Zone

[www.pbs.org/nova/combatoocs/](http://www.pbs.org/nova/combatoocs/)

*In this companion Web site to the NOVA program, find out how combat doctors decide whom to treat, learn what it was like to make this film, read experiences from five combat hospital doctors and nurses, view photos taken during the film's production, and try to interpret military medical photographs through time.*

Combat Medic Competition Challenges, Motivates Soldiers

[www.defendamerica.mil/articles/nov2003/a112503e.html](http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/nov2003/a112503e.html)

*Provides a look at the Combat Medic Challenge, a competition in which teams from eight Northern Iraq medical units square off to test battlefield medical tactics.*

Combat Medicine

[www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/jan-june03/combatoedicine\\_3-29.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/jan-june03/combatoedicine_3-29.html)

*Features an article on advances in civilian medicine and lessons learned from earlier conflicts and explores how these factors are transforming medics' methods of treating soldiers in Iraq.*

Principles of Medical Ethics

[www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8292.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8292.html)

*Includes the American Medical Association's standards of conduct.*

### Books

Kaplan, Jonathan.

**The Dressing Station: A Surgeon's Chronicle of War and Medicine.**

New York: Grove Press, 2001.

*Details a combat surgeon's personal experiences in war trauma centers in several countries, including Iraq.*

Pence, Gregory E.

**Classic Works in Medical Ethics: Core Philosophical Readings.**

Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1998.

*Explores several broad philosophical issues, including terminating the lives of dying patients and allocating scarce medical resources.*

# You Be the Judge

You are a member of the Transplant Review Board at City General Hospital. Four patients, all with the same lung size and blood type, are on a transplant waiting list. Your job is to decide who should receive the lung transplant when the next suitable organ becomes available.

## Procedure

- 1 Read each case study.
- 2 Discuss with team members what kinds of criteria would be important in making this decision and create a set of guidelines based on your discussion. Review each case using these guidelines.
- 3 Who would you choose for the transplant? Defend your reasoning.
- 4 Is there any additional information you would have liked to know in order to make your decision? If so, create a list of what else you would have wanted to know. State reasons why that information might have helped guide your choice.

### Mr. N.

A 41-year-old meteorologist. He has been divorced five times and has no children. Until his lung disease restricted his activity, his hobbies were bungee jumping and mountain climbing. Since he's been sick, Mr. N. has become depressed and at times even feels suicidal. His condition affects other organs, so while a transplant may not highly benefit his overall condition it would likely somewhat improve his quality of life for a few years. Mr. N's insurance company will pay if he has a lung transplant.

### Ms. L.

A 45-year-old single parent with five children. She is a chiropractor, but because of her illness she can only work a few hours each week. She enjoys watching TV and reading mystery novels. Ms. L. has emphysema. Her doctors believe that her disease is the result of 20 years of smoking three packs of cigarettes a day. Ms. L's life is expected to radically improve from a successful transplant. She does not have health insurance. To pay for her operation, she would have to ask for donations.

### Mr. Z.

A 54-year-old man. He has come to the United States from Europe for a lung transplant. He owns a successful international trading company. He misses his wife and two children who stayed behind. He spends a lot of time at his job, but enjoys fishing and traveling. While he is expected to benefit greatly from the transplant, his disease makes it likely that he will need another transplant in 10 years. If he receives the lungs, he will not only pay for the operation himself, but will also make a large donation to the hospital.

### Mrs. P.

An 88-year-old widow. She was happily married for 32 years. Recently, her husband died, leaving Mrs. P. alone to care for a big house in the country. She enjoys gardening and flower arranging. Mrs. P. also volunteers four hours each week at the local AIDS clinic, caring for infants with HIV. Without a transplant, Mrs. P. will have to be hooked up to an oxygen mask and have limited mobility. A successful transplant would enable her to expand what she currently does throughout the day. Medicaid will pay her medical bills.