Physicians, Medical Associations and Death Penalty

Giovanni A. Fava

University of Bologna, Italy

In the September–October issue of 2000 (Vol. 69, p. 231) this journal published an editorial asking American medical associations (and particularly the American Psychiatric Association, APA) to take action against the death penalty in the US. The President of the APA, Dr. Daniel B. Borenstein, informed us that, following the publication of the editorial, the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the APA, on October 23–24, 2000, approved a moratorium on capital punishment in the US. The actual language of what was approved is as follows:

‘Whereas the American Bar Association has concluded that the death penalty is administered in an unfair and arbitrary manner and has recommended a moratorium on executions until proper reforms are implemented, and

Whereas psychiatrists, due to their involvement in and familiarity with the criminal justice system, have become increasingly aware of the weaknesses and deficiencies in the capital sentencing process including consideration in regard to the mentally ill and developmentally disabled;

The American Psychiatric Association endorses the moratorium on capital punishment in the United States until jurisdiction seeking to reform the death penalty implement policies and procedures to assure that capital punishment, if used at all is administered fairly and impartially in accord with the basic requirements of due process.’

We are very pleased of this first leading step taken by the APA, which we hope will be followed by other medical associations, and of the role played by this journal.