

To Resuscitate or Not to Resuscitate?: Problem Handouts



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To Resuscitate or Not to Resuscitate?

Problem Statement

You are a member of an ethics committee at a large hospital. It is the committee's job to make the final decision on all cases brought to it. The decisions of the committee stand and must be obeyed, unless the parties involved in the decision wish to seek outside intervention. You were specially chosen to be on this committee because you hold the deontological view of ethics. You have been asked by the hospital's CEO to help with a case. The attending physician (physician in charge) has brought a case before the CEO. The attending physician would like some assistance in helping the situation, described below, from ever happening again.

General Information about the Case:

The case involves Glenda Adams who has terminal cancer. During a treatment, Ms. Adams died. The resident resuscitated Ms. Adams. Ms. Adams is now very angry with the entire medical staff and is refusing treatment. She is so angry she is refusing even to talk to the staff. The resident is very upset, feeling that his efforts were right. He doesn't understand why Ms. Adams is angry with him. The attending physician wants to help the resident understand the case.

Details about the Case:

Glenda Adams is a 53 year old woman with terminal breast cancer. She underwent a mastectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation two years ago. Despite the treatment, the cancer returned and metastasized (moved) to several organs. She underwent further chemotherapy and radiation, but the cancer continues to grow. She was hospitalized this last time for "palliative treatment", or treatment to make her more comfortable and reduce the size of the cancerous growths. She has about six months to live.

As a part of her treatment, Ms. Adams received blood products. Following her last blood transfusion, she had a severe allergic reaction and went into cardiac arrest (her heart stopped beating). The resident called for Ms. Adams to be resuscitated; the resuscitation was successful.

Ms. Adams is now very angry with the resident and the entire medical staff. She is refusing all treatment and even refuses to eat. She refuses to speak with her physicians and usually turns her face or back to any healthcare worker that enters the room.

The attending physician is seeking counsel from you, the ethics committee. The resident under his charge doesn't understand why Ms. Adams is so angry with him. The resident states, "I gave her six more months of life. She talked about seeing her granddaughter born and going to see the Grand Canyon before she died. I gave her the opportunity to do this. The reaction to the transfusion wasn't expected. I can understand dying due to the cancer, but the transfusion reaction was a one in a million occurrence. She should be grateful I gave her back the last six months of life. I don't understand why she is angry. I am very, very upset because she is angry with me. I simply don't understand. I think I am a good person."

Your deontological ethics committee has been asked to help with the case. Specifically, the attending physician and hospital CEO want to know the following:



1. Was there anything the resident could have done to ensure Ms. Adams wanted to be resuscitated? Define any new ethics terms you might use and justify your responses.
2. Does Ms. Adams have the right to refuse further treatment? Define any new ethics terms you might use and justify your responses.
3. Did the resident's actions interfere with any of the following: beneficence, non-maleficence, fidelity, veracity, autonomy, obligations to the patient? You need not define these terms, but justify your responses.
4. Speaking entirely as someone who strongly holds the deontological ideals, did the resident do anything wrong? Justify your response. If you need additional information (information not included in this case) to justify your response, state what information you may have needed to make this decision.
5. What action(s) led the resident to believe he was a good person? Is there another ethical term he could have used for his good behavior? Find the term and use another example to help define it.