

Ethics case study essay



Ethics Case Study Everyday health care workers around the world are faced with tough decisions. The law guides many decisions but some decisions require ethical considerations. Making good ethical decisions is not always as easy as it seems. Making ethical decisions is even harder when the primary intention is to be helpful, but it is beyond an employee's qualifications. Jerry's Qualifications versus Necessary Qualifications Qualification as a medical assistant and a licensed practical nurse (LPN) does not qualify Jerry to fill, or even refill, any prescription.

Only pharmacists, doctors, and other certified professionals can order medications. Jerry working as medical assistant means he is responsible for both administrative and clinical duties (Fremgen, 2009). Jerry is a LPN, which means that he is responsible for many of the same duties as registered nurses, which does not include filling or refilling prescriptions (Fremgen, 2009). Types of doctors who are allowed to write prescriptions include optometrists, veterinarians, podiatrists, clinical pharmacists, and dentists (University Health Care, 2008).

Nurse practitioners, psychologists, and physician assistants can often prescribe and order medications. Because Jerry holds none of the fore-mentioned titles he is unauthorized to order a refill on a prescription. Does Type of Medication Make a Difference? Whether Jerry is refilling a prescription for blood pressure medication, blood thinners, or valium he is still overstepping the boundaries of his profession. The Valium or Diazepam that the patient is requesting a refill for can be very addictive (PubMed Health, 2010).

This means that people can become dependent on the effects of valium and desire to use it more often or in larger quantities than instructed. Therefore, refilling valium may be thought of as more ethically unjust than a prescription drug that is not addictive or used recreationally. If a patient called with an emergency situation, such as running out of blood pressure medication that he or she requires daily, the best thing for Jerry to do would be to contact Dr. Williams as soon as possible to help the patient. Refilling the prescription in a situation like this would still be incorrect.

If the patient were in a life-threatening situation Jerry should instruct him or her to go directly to the closest emergency room for treatment.

Accountability The doctrine of respondent superior, or doctrine of respondeat superior, means that an employer is responsible for careless actions or errors of his or her employees while employees are doing their jobs (Cornell University Law School, 1993). The doctrine of respondent superior would protect Jerry only if Dr. Williams controlled Jerry's actions and made him refill the prescription for Valium.

Therefore, the doctrine of respondent superior would not protect Jerry. Jerry would be held accountable for any adverse reaction the patient might have.

Advice Jerry should always adhere to protocol. Jerry must understand that it is very important to never go beyond the boundaries of his qualifications. No matter how persistent a patient might be, Jerry must talk to Dr. Williams before making any decisions, especially decisions he is not qualified to make. When a patient asks Jerry to do something he knows he is not qualified to do, he must explain to the patient why he cannot fulfill his or her requests.

If Jerry is unsure if he can refill the prescription he should ask his superior before taking action. Many companies have policies in place to notify patients of necessary timeframes to process a prescription refill. This way, patients understand that they must call enough in advance to request a refill so that they will receive it by the time it is needed. Jerry should learn the policy at his workplace and inform the patient of the company policies. Law and Ethics Many legal and ethical issues that can affect the decision Jerry makes about ordering the prescription refill.

If Jerry knows that he cannot refill the prescription it may discourage him from doing so. Jerry should know that if he refills the prescription he could lose his job and face legal consequences. Jerry could go to jail and pay numerous fines if he is charged with falsifying refills. The knowledge of right and wrong might deter Jerry from deciding to refill the prescription. Society expects all health care professionals to uphold a certain moral or ethical code of conduct. Doing something he knows is wrong would go against this code. Jerry faces several consequences if he orders a refill and little or no benefits.

Jerry may believe that he should order a refill because of other reasons. Because the patient claims to be a friend of the doctor Jerry may think that he needs to order the refill to please his employer. Jerry may feel a sense of empowerment because he was asked to do something beyond his qualifications. Feeling powerful might persuade Jerry to order the refill. Jerry could also try to justify an order for a refill if he believes that he is helping someone in need. Making an Ethical Decision Jerry may use several methods to help him make an ethical decision.

These are the utilitarian method, the rights method, the common-good method, the justice method, and the virtue method (Velasquez & Andre, 2010). The utilitarian method is to make a decision that will produce the greatest benefit, and the least amount of harm. Jerry might see that there are greater consequences than benefits if he decides to reorder the prescription. The rights method shows Jerry that he should not show favoritism to this patient just because he claims to be the doctor's friend. The common-good and rights methods do not apply to Jerry's situation.

The justice method might help Jerry to realize that it is not unfair in any way if he tells the patient he cannot order the refill. Jerry should use the virtue method to see that ordering the prescription refill would be wrong. He should ask himself if ordering the refill would be ethical or virtuous. Because it is not ethical he should decide to say no to the patient. Conclusion Part of being a health care professional is the ability to make ethical and law-abiding decisions at the same time. Inability to adhere to the law can have disastrous consequences. However, it is always important to make ethical decisions using good moral judgment.

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