

Imaging Scenario: Student Competency

Scenario # 4

The Case of Who Goes First

Suzanna Mendoza; Ethics 101; December 6, 2022

The case of who goes first is about deciding which of 2 critical patients' needs a procedure first. Let me introduce you to Marguerite, an 89-year-old widow experiencing a heart attack. She was admitted into the cardiac intensive care unit at 3:00 a.m. Her internist, Dr. K, ordered an angiogram to determine the status of the heart attack. Dr. K, who is also a close family friend, knows the procedure needs to be done within the first six-hour window of the heart attack. As soon as the on call surgical team and the Dr. K, who lives 30 minutes away, show up, the procedure can begin. The team is ready to go at 4:30 a.m. and Marguerite is barely conscious and is already transferred from the CICU to the surgical unit. Coincidentally, at 4:30 a.m. Sarah, an unconscious 45-year-old woman, suffering a heart attack was brought in the emergency room. After the ER physician consulted with Sarah's physician, they decided she needed an angioplasty to save her life. When a call was made to the surgery department, the ER was told the room was already set up for Dr. K's patient. There is not another surgery team or room in that hospital, so a decision was made. Since Sarah needs an angioplasty to survive, they will use the angiography team for her and not Marguerite. Dr. K was still at home when he received a call informing him, his patient would not be able to have the angiogram because the hospital was going to use the surgery team for a patient younger than Marguerite and had a greater chance of recovery. Unfortunately, Sarah took longer than expected to stabilize before and after the procedure. The 6-hour window for Marguerite to have the angiogram had passed, she expired the following morning.

The problem in this story is that a patient died because another patient was taken into the surgery suite before the scheduled patient. Marguerite was scheduled, transferred to surgery suite, and a surgery team was ready to have the procedure. Sarah, a younger patient that came in through the Emergency Room was taken to the operating room before Marguerite. Marguerite expired the

following morning, after missing the window for the angiogram to be performed. Because Sarah required the procedure to be done in order to survive, I agreed with the physician's decision to take Sarah to the operating room before Marguerite. In emergency situations, immediate treatment was necessary for the most critical patient. Emergency room patients are prioritized before in hospital stay patients. The fact that Marguerite is an 89-year-old patient, her chances of recovery are much less than Sarah's, and she poses a much higher risk of fatality. Also, I believe Sarah deserves another opportunity at life, since Marguerite has experienced most of her life. Looking at an alternative, Marguerite could have been considered as a transfer to another facility because she had a 6-hour window versus Sarah, who need the procedure immediately. Autonomy would not come into play because neither patient was competent to make a decision on their own behalf. Because one could have chosen to transfer, and Marguerite could have signed a DNR.

Legal issues could include Marguerite's family wanting to file a malpractice suit. I feel that there are no criminal acts, but this could fall into unintentional torts. The negligence occurred when the facility delayed a scheduled patient's procedure.

A professional issue includes using your best judgement on making the decision for the patient. In Codes of Ethics, number 5, The radiologic technologist assesses situations; exercises care, discretion, and judgement; assumes responsibility for professional decisions; and acts in the best interest of the patient. The best interest for Marguerite would be to have the procedure done in the six-hour window.

To conclude, I agree that Sarah was the correct choice in receiving the care immediately before Marguerite. My decision is since Sarah was much younger, and that the survival rate was higher due to her age. I also believe that Marguerite has had 89 years of life, and Sarah has an opportunity to have a future.