

Imaging Scenario: The Case Who Goes First

Scenario #4

By: Maria Joy, Ethics 101, December 8th, 2022

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For this assignment, I chose scenario number four, where the patient, Marguerite M., who is an eighty-nine-year-old widow, just had a massive heart attack (myocardial infarction) and is in the hospital's cardiac intensive care. The next step for her care would be for the doctors to give Marguerite an angiogram and the resulting treatment. Things are further complicated though because the radiologist lives thirty minutes away from the hospital and the radiologist must be in the hospital before the procedure can begin, and the medical staff needs to be able to get the angiogram done within the first six hours from Marguerite's infarction, for it to be effective. At 4:30 am the team is ready to begin transferring Marguerite, who is barely conscious, and move her from the intensive care unit (ICU) and into the surgical suite. Yet at the very same time, literally, at 4:30 am as well, Sarah W., who is a forty-five-year-old woman, is brought in by ambulance. Sarah is unconscious and has just had a massive heart attack. The ER physicians determine that Sarah needs a balloon angiography for them to be able to save her life. So, the ER doctors call to get the room set up, which happens to be the very room that has been set up for Marguerite. The hospital doesn't have another team or surgical room for Sarah. A decision is then made because Sarah's survival depends on her getting the balloon angiography done, so the doctors decide to use the team and room for Sarah and not for Marguerite. The doctors choose Sarah because she is younger than Marguerite and has a better chance of full recovery. Unfortunately, though, it takes the team longer than expected for them to stabilize Sarah. Marguerite's six-hour window closed within this time before her procedure could even begin, and sadly, she passed away the following morning.

I must admit that upon reading this scenario I initially believed that there were both legal and ethical problems that would arise from this situation. I first thought how could life seem so meaningless to the doctors that they would basically toss a coin and pick the younger patient. I was pretty upset about it but then I reread the scenario and I picked up on the fact that Marguerite was not just older, but that she was eighty-nine years of age. Also, she only had a certain window of time, and further, thinking from a medical perspective, how well could her quality of life be from surviving a massive heart attack if she could make it through something so traumatic like that? This of course is assuming that Marguerite had already lived a happy life prior to her massive heart attack. So ethically speaking, the whole concept of nonmaleficence comes to my mind. It really and truly appears that the doctors were trying to avoid the risk of evil and do good. I say this because the doctors didn't positively know that by them performing Sarah's balloon angiography, it would take longer than anticipated, causing Marguerite's window to close and would make death that much more inevitable for her. They knew the risks, but they were merely trying to aid both patients and unfortunately, other factors negatively intervened.

I can't help but think about the families on both sides of this scenario though. Sarah's family is probably left incredibly thankful because Sarah has another chance at life. However, Marguerite's family, depending on how healthy Marguerite was prior but assuming that she was relatively healthy because she did make it to eighty-nine years of age. They could very well be wishing that she had had another chance at life as well. And though everyone has the right to seek legal counsel, they don't appear to have grounds to even have a case because the doctors did what they thought was best. They gave the care that they could with the limitations that they had and though it was only partial to the desired outcome it still looks like they are clear of anything that could arise from Marguerite's family. Also, when Marguerite's doctor explains to the family what happened and that Marguerite has passed away, I honestly think that even the very family would know that because she was eighty-nine, that the doctors did all they could but since it ended up being between the two patients, that it does, in fact, make sense as to why the doctors made the decision that they did.

In conclusion, reading this scenario brought an awareness of different things that can arise within the medical field and to really and truly think about things from every point of view and not just my own.