

**The Life Behind the Patient**

Imaging Scenario: Student Comprehensive Evaluation

Scenario #5 - *The Case of the Biker*

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Around midnight, a computed tomography technologist is called in to the emergency department to perform a head scan on a biker who is severely injured from his collision with a car. She can see the biker is covered in tattoos, dressed in leather, unshaven, in need of a bath, and accompanied by other “scary-looking” bikers. These characteristics of the scenario cause the technologist to have feelings of fear, irritation, and bias. Her negative, judgmental assumptions and discomfort cause her to have a poor interaction with the patient and produce a low-quality exam. Because of this, she is later questioned by her manager on why a negative customer service survey arrived over the exam she performed for the biker. Subsequently, when the biker returns to the hospital for a follow-up CT scan, the technologist does not recognize him because she discovers that the biker is actually a respected hospital attorney dressed in a business suit. He explained how his passion outside of business is riding his motorcycle with his biker buddies on the weekend. This causes the CT technologist embarrassment and she quickly becomes speechless. This scenario overall highlights how personal judgment and bias can quickly compromise patient care and raise many ethical, legal, and professional concerns. Therefore, health care professionals do not truly see the life behind the patient, and should never compromise patient care because of their personal beliefs and bias.

There are several ethical dilemmas that come out of this case. For starters, the CT technologist allowed her personal opinion and bias to interfere with her duty to treat all patients with respect and dignity, without any discrimination. *The ARRT Code of Ethics, Principle 3*, states how all radiologic technologists must “provide services to humanity with full respect for the dignity of mankind”, and *Principle 5* requires technologists to deliver care without discrimination based on personal attributes or lifestyle. Therefore, the ethical problem in this scenario is that the CT technologist’s assumptions caused poor communication and low quality

care, which could potentially compromise a diagnosis. Some possible solutions for this ethical scenario are (1) the technologist could have come up with a checklist to mentally go by to keep her professionalism with the patient, or (2) the technologist could have recognized her bias and actively corrected her behaviors. The second solution would be the best and would ensure patient safety, meet professional expectations, and maintain ethical integrity. In this specific scenario, if the technologist would have taken a moment to self-reflect and treat the patient with the same valuable care she would give any other patient, the outcome would have been very different.

From a more legal standpoint, the CT technologist's actions in this scenario could have exposed herself and the facility to liability. Her producing a low-quality CT scan due to negligence could fall under unintentional torts, specifically negligence, if the standard of care was not met. If the exam led to delayed treatment or a misdiagnosis, the technologist could be at risk for malpractice, for, malpractice occurs when a health care professional fails to perform at the level they are expected to. Her behavior in this scenario also raises some concerns related to professional misconduct under the hospital's policy, both this and her negative patient survey could prompt an investigation. Therefore, even though the technologist did no criminal acts, her actions and behaviors still could have civil legal consequences. The scenario shows why health care workers must consistently follow protocol, communicate clearly, and uphold the standard of care no matter what their personal feelings are.

Professionally, there are also many issues in this scenario, for the technologist violated many *ARRT Standards of Ethics*. *Principle 1* of the *ARRT Code of Ethics* states that technologists must conduct themselves in a professional manner that supports the patient's safety. The technologist's behaviors conflict with this principle when she unprofessionally lets her bias take over and performs a poor exam, which could compromise safety. Her behavior also conflicts

with *Principle 9*, which highlights respect for the patient's right to quality care. Therefore, under the *ARRT Rules of Ethics*, the technologist's actions and behaviors could fall under "failure to provide competent care" and "any action that adversely affects patient care". When the technologists allowed judgement to affect her performance, she compromised both the quality of the exam she performed and the patient's experience. Additionally, professionalism is an awareness of the conduct, aims, and qualities defining a given profession - which was not demonstrated by the technologist in this scenario. Overall, the technologist's behavior damages patient trust, hurts the hospital's reputation, and violates her professional duty to act impartially.

In conclusion, this scenario is a reminder to imaging professionals and other healthcare workers how easily bias can influence behavior and negatively impact patient care. No one truly knows the life behind each patient, and should never let their bias get in the way and compromise patient care. Ethical, legal, and professional standards require technologists to treat every patient equally, regardless of their appearance or lifestyle. Therefore, if I had been in this situation, I would have taken a moment to acknowledge my personal discomfort internally, reminded myself of my ethical duty to provide patients with unbiased care, and approached the patient with professionalism and respect. I would make sure to use clear communication, follow protocol, and focus on producing a high-quality exam. I would not let my bias get in the way whatsoever, because I want to provide the best quality of care. I truly do not know the life behind the patient and have no room to judge or do my job poorly, no matter what. Ultimately, when technologists uphold ethical, legal, and professional obligations, they protect their patients, themselves, and the integrity of the radiologic profession.

### References

*The American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT)*. ARRT. (n.d.-b).

<https://www.arrt.org/>

Towsley-Cook, D. M., & Young, T. A. (2013). *Ethical and legal issues for Imaging Professionals*. Mosby.