

Imaging Scenario: Student Comprehensive Evaluation

Scenario 1: The Case of Misunderstanding

Kelsey Stewart- Ethics 101- 12/12/2025

Introduction

In this scenario, a pregnant woman who is six months along arrives at a trauma imaging center after a car crash. Although her seatbelt and airbag protected her from hitting the windshield, she is bruised and extremely worried because she has not felt her baby move in a while. While waiting in the imaging suite, she overhears staff in the next room using frightening terms like “fetal death,” “crushing injuries,” and “oxygen deprivation.” Even if that conversation was not about her, she believes that it is, which causes her to panic and become hysterical. When she asked the radiographer about what she had heard, he froze and did not provide her with any comfort or peace of mind. Her severe emotional distress triggers premature labor, and both she and the baby require long hospital stays and extensive medical treatment. Later, she files a malpractice lawsuit claiming negligence and breach of confidentiality. This case shows how ethical, legal, and professional issues can quickly escalate when healthcare workers fail to follow proper standards of care.

Ethical Dilemmas and Decision-Making

One major ethical dilemma in this scenario is a clear breach of confidentiality. The ARRT Code of Ethics states that radiologic technologists must protect all confidential information and respect the patient’s right to privacy at all times. The staff violated this professional responsibility by discussing sensitive medical information loud enough for a patient to overhear. Another ethical dilemma is the lack of appropriate communication. When the patient demanded answers, the radiographer did not know how to respond and offered no reassurance. Good patient care requires empathy, honesty, and clear communication, especially during stressful situations.

Using an ethical problem-solving model, the radiographer should have followed three steps: identify the problem, consider possible solutions, and choose the best option. The problem was that the patient overheard distressing information and became terrified. Possible solutions could include finding a way to

ease her mind or involve a medical provider. The best option would be to speak calmly, provide emotional support, and immediately call a nurse or physician to give accurate information. This response aligns with ARRT Code of Ethics Principle 5, which states technologists must act in the best interest of the patient and use good judgment.

Legal Considerations

Legally, several issues may arise in the malpractice lawsuit. The first is negligence, which is an unintentional tort. Negligence happens when a healthcare worker fails to meet the expected standard of care, resulting in a harmful outcome. Speaking loudly about medical information in a patient-care area can be seen as failing to protect privacy and confidentiality. There is also a clear breach of confidentiality, which violates HIPAA protections and professional requirements for patient privacy.

Another legal concern is causation. Because the woman's emotional distress may have contributed to her going into premature labor, the lawsuit may argue that the staff's actions directly caused harm. This could support a malpractice claim, which involves professional negligence leading to injury. Courts may review whether the imaging facility provided proper staff training and whether it had policies in place to prevent breaches of privacy. If not, the institution could also be held responsible.

Professional Issues and ARRT Standards

The actions in this scenario also violate several professional standards from the ARRT Standards of Ethics. The Code of Ethics, which guides professional behavior, includes Principle 9, which states technologists must protect confidential information, and Principle 3, which requires respectful, honest communication with patients. Additionally, the Rules of Ethics, which are enforceable, specifically prohibit breaching patient confidentiality or engaging in conduct that harms or disrespects patients. Violating these rules could lead to disciplinary action, including suspension or loss of certification.

Textbooks on patient care emphasize that radiologic technologists must provide both technical skill and emotional support. Patients rely on technologists for comfort, reassurance, and clear communication,

especially during traumatic events. In this scenario, the staff failed to protect privacy, communicate effectively, and provide compassionate care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, unethical and unprofessional behavior in this imaging scenario directly led to the lawsuit. The patient's privacy and emotional well-being were not protected, which caused serious consequences for both her and her baby. Ethical problem-solving skills, such as identifying the problem, choosing the best solution, and acting with compassion, could have prevented this situation. Legally, the case involves negligence, breach of confidentiality, and potential malpractice. Professionally, the imaging staff violated several ARRT ethical principles and rules. If I were the technologist in this scenario, I would remain calm, reassure the patient, avoid giving medical details beyond my scope, and immediately call a qualified provider. This would maintain patient trust, protect her emotional and physical health, and uphold legal and professional standards.

References

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