Parental Delay of Medical Treatment Based on Religious Beliefs

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In today's world, great advancements have been made in the field of medical science. Despite these developments, many prefer to put their faith in spirituality and religion rather than a physician. In contrast, medical practitioners also often ignore the spiritual needs of their patients and fail to guide them in making complex medical decisions. This paper aims to analyze a case study of paternal postponement of medical intervention based on belief in miracles and prayers.

Decision-Making and Autonomy

One of the important tenets of medical ethics is patient autonomy and the right to decision-making. When working with minors, the principles of autonomy and decision-making often present a dilemma. In the given case study, the decision taken by Mike was detrimental to James's health and was rooted in a religious belief. Therefore, the physician should not have allowed it. Although the parental decision is central to childcare, it is important to note that the physicians working with minors are obligated to discuss all possibilities, "respecting children's rights and liberties while protecting them from harm" (Strom-Gottfried, 2008). In this case scenario, it was the ethical and legal responsibility of the physician to intervene in the decision that was potentially harmful to James (Katz et al., 2016). The delay in intervention resulted in increased deterioration, and James then required permanent dialysis and a kidney transplant.

It is the responsibility of medical health practitioners to protect minors who are at risk of medical neglect (Katz et al., 2016). Upon detecting a risk of danger due to parental decisions, inaction, or actions, it is the legal and professional obligation of the physician to report the parents to relevant authorities. Continuation of life-saving intervention is also ethically justified even if the parents' object is also in line with the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence.

Christian View Regarding Health and Sickness

For long, religious beliefs have influenced individual healthcare practices and perceptions regarding sickness, health, and healing. Many believe that good health is a reward for good deeds, while sickness is often regarded as a punishment from God or a means of testing one's faith. Mike viewed James's illness as a test from God; therefore, he sought to pass it through prayer. However, later, he questioned his belief. He wonders if God is punishing him and James or if his faith is not strong enough. It is not uncommon for religious individuals to introspect about the cause of sickness and why it was sent their way (Rumun, 2014). A staunch belief is often associated with the reward of good

health, while maladies are viewed as a reprisal for lack of devotion. This view of health and sickness is detrimental as it influences the healing practices opted by such individuals. Mike believes that his son's illness is a punishment from God. Therefore, he seeks recovery through prayer rather than medical interventions.

Christianity teaches its followers to seek medical treatment in case of illness. As stated in Matthew 9:12, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (New International Version, 2011). The above-mentioned quote from the scripture clarifies that the disciples of Jesus are free to seek medical treatment. While those in good health do not need a physician, the unwell must seek help from a doctor. This ascertains that Christians are free to seek professional consultation and must not refuse prescribed intervention. They must view medical science as a gift of God, which He bestowed upon his people for their benefit. In Corinthians 6:19-20, the human body is regarded as a temple, and Christians are obligated "to honour God with your bodies" (New International Version, 2011). Thus, we must take care of this body and utilize the means necessary for its care.

As a Christian, Mike must ensure that his decision truly follows the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. He must ensure that no harm comes to James and should allow him the medical treatment suggested by the doctors. He must trust in the health care professional as an agent of God who takes up the work of treating people while God himself provides healing. While the power of prayer cannot be overlooked, praying without action can often result in disastrous outcomes, as was observed in James's case. Permitting the physicians to provide the necessary treatment while seeking God's help through prayer is often the best course of action.

Spiritual Assessment

A spiritual needs assessment is often helpful in identifying the spiritual needs of patients and their family members. It aids the physicians in providing support to the family while determining the best course of treatment, one that is consistent with their religious beliefs. It also helps the physician identify the context in which medical discussion must take place and provides insight into the beliefs that contradict medical decisions (Isaac et al., 2016).

The spiritual assessment is aimed at supporting religious beliefs through tools that explore multiple dimensions, including purpose, values, transcendental experiences, and an identity of the self (Monod et al., 2010). Once the needs are identified, further decisions are based on the physician's capability to satisfy these spiritual requirements. A physician's role does not extend to providing spiritual guidance to patients; however, they can direct them to suitable pastoral care. Chaplains are better equipped to inform patients and their families about the risks involved in forgoing treatment. Moreover, they may be more suitable to persuade patients about the significance of medical intervention.

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