

2021-2022 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

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Case #2: Choices in the Workplace

Harriet Jones works as a health aide at a nursing home not too far from her apartment that she shares with her mother and her two school-aged children. She enjoys the work – she finds it satisfying to help others. While the job provides her with an income, she finds that she often struggles to support her family’s needs. Her own mother’s health is failing, her children need new shoes and clothes, and the cost of groceries are steadily rising.

During a coffee break on one of her shifts, Harriet overhears two nurses, one of whom is her supervisor, making fun of a nursing home resident in a very cruel way. This is a resident that Harriet looks after and she has developed a fondness towards this resident.

Shocked, Harriet leaves the room without anyone noticing she overheard what was said. She is disturbed by what she witnessed and is also concerned that nurses who disrespect their patients by mocking them may not treat their patients well. Her first impulse is to report the incident to the administration. She can’t bear to think that vulnerable patients are the butt of jokes and may even be subjected to disrespectful or even neglectful care. On the other hand, if she reports the incident, it’s possible that her supervisor could retaliate in ways that could put Harriet’s job in jeopardy. In addition, what proof does she have that the incident even happened? The two nurses could deny it, and then it could turn into a nasty “she said, they said” situation. Would anyone in the administration believe her?

Match Question: What action, if any, should Harriet take and why?

Study Questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders in this case? What is at stake for all of them? How should Harriet weigh these various factors before acting?
2. Is it ethical for Harriet to continue to work at her job and not report the behavior to her supervisor?
3. Do we have an obligation to do what seems to us to be most ethical, even if it results in serious personal loss to ourselves and/or those close to us?