

2023-2024 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

To learn more about this event, please visit:

<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

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Case 1: The Scarce Resource

Curtis is a former Marine who has struggled with alcoholism since returning home from active service. He does not have any family, he relies on the government for health insurance, and he has been living on the streets for the last 3 years. Due to his frequent and unhealthy level of alcohol consumption, his liver is failing which requires him to make monthly trips to his local hospital for blood transfusions. Curtis' treatment team eventually suggests that he receive a liver transplant, which will eliminate the need for regular transfusions.

This would benefit the hospital since its blood supply has not kept up with demand. If Curtis has the transplant, the hospital would have an additional supply of blood for future patients who require transfusions. The transplant, however, would require that Curtis attend follow-up appointments and commit to stop drinking. Given his history, it is unclear that he would comply. The surgery requires Curtis's consent, which he is refusing to provide.

Curtis' treatment team, in collaboration with the hospital's risk management team, is left with a tough decision. Since doctors are obligated to "do no harm," do they continue supplying Curtis with transfusions even though the blood supply is needed elsewhere? (This is possible legally, since the demand for blood outstrips the current supply.) Or does the hospital deny Curtis' transfusions in an attempt to make him agree to the surgery since without surgery or continued transfusions, he would most likely die in a matter of months?

Match Question: Should Curtis' treatment team continue to supply blood transfusions?

Study Questions

1. Should the man's "worth" be taken into consideration? Is the fact that he's not actively contributing to society important to this case?
2. Is the hospital "leaving the man to die" if he had the option of surgery, but refused to take it?
3. When hospitals are low on resources, what factors do YOU think they should take into consideration when determining which patients should receive what care?
4. Does it make a difference that the patient is on state-funded insurance due to his lack of income?