



INFORMED CONSENT

The Problem of Respect for
Autonomy




SCENARIO

Ike is an elderly widower who has been admitted to a rehab ward after a stroke. The stroke has left him with difficulty swallowing and significant weakness in his extremities. He is frail, but pleasant, alert and oriented, although he is no longer able to manage his own activities of daily living. Prior to his retirement, he worked as a chef, and food remains very important to him.



SCENARIO

As his ability to swallow has been limited by the stroke, it has been recommended that he be provided with a pureed diet. Ike declines this diet and politely requests a regular diet. His son, who lives in another city, assures you that they understand the risks, but agrees with Ike. "Food is the last pleasure he has. Please feed him what he prefers."



WHAT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR IKE?

- What would you do if Ike was in your care?
- Why?

WHAT IS THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR IKE?

- Ike's situation is complicated by conflicts in values.
- Respect for autonomy is the foundational value in informed consent. These two concepts are discussed over the next few slides, followed by some questions for reflection and discussion.

AUTONOMY

- The quality or state of being independent, free, and self-directing.
- Freedom to act in accordance with self-chosen plan (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009)
- Requires *liberty* (freedom from controlling influences) and *agency* (capacity)

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- Practical application of respect for a patient's autonomy (Jonsen, Siegler & Winslade, 2010)
- Requires dialogue between care provider and patient/family
 - Patient states problem and requests help
 - Care provider makes diagnosis and recommendation
 - Patient agrees or disagrees with the recommendation
 - Discussion is revisited on an ongoing basis



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In order to make a truly autonomous decision about the recommendation,

- The health care provider must
 - Provide the rationale for the recommendation
 - Outline any alternatives that are available
 - Explain risks and benefits of each option
- The patient must
 - Be able to understand the information provided
 - Be provided with complete information



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What obligations do you have toward Ike?
- How can you determine if Ike's decision is well-informed?
- What is the best way to ensure Ike's autonomy is respected?
- If this happened in your practice, where would you go for guidance?
- Apply the Ethical Decision-Making framework used by your organization or profession to develop a possible resolution to the issue in this scenario.



RESOURCES

Please go to the MB-PHEN website for additional resources and discussion points.

www.MB-PHEN.ca



REFERENCES

- autonomy. (n.d.). *Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary*. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/autonomy>
- Beauchamp, T. & Childress, J. (2012). *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. 7th ed. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Jonsen, A., Seigler, M., & Winslade, W. (2010). *Clinical Ethics*. McGraw Hill: New York.