

# Ethical reasoning in clinical practice

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An 82-year-old male patient who was acutely unwell was brought to emergency unit. No medical records or relatives were available. He was in severe respiratory distress and soon became drowsy and showed signs of imminent respiratory failure. The ETU physician performed emergency endotracheal intubation and transferred the patient to the intensive care unit.

Medical records were obtained later and showed that the patient was diagnosed with advanced chronic obstructive airway disease (COPD) and having a disseminated pancreatic malignancy, on palliative care.

He was ventilated for seven days and given inotropes, bronchodilators and antibiotics with no signs of improvement and developed ventilator associated pneumonia. After a multi-disciplinary meeting, the medical team decided further escalation of treatment would be inappropriate. The issue was discussed with his family, however his wife strongly requests to provide maximum therapy.

1. What are ethical principles involved in this scenario at the time of admission?
2. How do you apply the principle of autonomy in this scenario?
3. What is the ethical principle behind the ETU physician's decision to intubate?
4. If the patient said not to intubate at ETU, what is your decision as the ETU physician?

5. In the current state of illness, with prolonged ventilation and ventilator associated pneumonia and other complications, discuss the ethical principles that would govern the further management and how you would justify the decision to not to escalate.
6. How do you handle the strong request by the wife?
7. During the meeting with family the son who lives abroad, returned because of his father's illness, request the possibility of discontinuation of life support to end his father's suffering. How do you approach this situation?

## How to handle the scenario

A common ethical dilemma

Identify the key problems

Apply ethical principles

Reason out how to address the issues using ethical principles

## To Pass

- Satisfactory initial evaluation
- Satisfactory plan to address the issues

## Common areas tested

Autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice

Informed consent, Capacity

Accepting error, Truth telling, Confidentiality

End of life decisions

Allocation of scarce resources

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