

Rachel Freundlich
Biomedical Ethics
Professor McGarry
Ethical Argument

Transplanting Principles

Oftentimes, medical care produces ethical dilemmas which must be addressed in order to ensure the best and rightful care to a patient. One such case features Yulia Hicks, a 14 year old girl who suffers from a genetic disease and requires a kidney transplant. As Yulia and her parents prepared for the transplant and completed many tests, workups, and invested many hours of time, they were reassured by the hospital that the Covid-19 vaccination was not required in order for the transplant to take place. In the days following an extensive 8 hour workup, Yulia's parents were informed that the Covid-19 vaccination was not a recommendation as had been previously understood but rather it was a requirement. Mr. and Mrs. Hicks were devastated by the news and pushed for the transplant to go through without the vaccine, but the hospital adamantly refused.

This case presents an ethical dilemma involving autonomy vs beneficence. While autonomy and beneficence are both core values of patient care, they often are at odds with each other when the desires of the patient and the provider's calculated plan do not align. In this scenario, Mr. and Mrs. Hicks do not wish for their daughter to be vaccinated against Covid-19. They understand the risks and benefits of the vaccine and choose to forego it. The hospital, on the other hand, is refusing treatment unless Yulia is vaccinated. The hospital wishes to promote the health of the patient and believes that without the vaccine Yulia is at increased risk of becoming sick. This is compounded by the fact that she will be taking immunosuppressants in order for her body to accept the transplanted kidney. While both parties present valid arguments, I believe that autonomy must be the ruling principle in this case.

As one of the Core Values of PA Practice, it is imperative that patients are given the choice to determine their plan of care and course of action. While it is equally essential to be concerned for the wellbeing of each patient and to do our utmost to provide the highest level of care based upon our understanding and knowledge of medicine, autonomy may rank higher. As always, it is important to

consider the nature and purpose of our work as PAs. Is it not to do good for the patient? It is difficult to rationalize denying treatment to a patient due to the refusal of a vaccine which the patient deems dangerous. As patient-centered care has been promoted and we have shied away from paternalistic practice, we can not withhold life saving medical treatment of this nature due to patient preference. Patient's have rights and wishes that must be upheld.

It is understandable to wonder whether beneficence is fit to rule in this case. One may consider that the patient does not fully understand the repercussions of not receiving the vaccine and the ramifications of the immunosuppression necessary for the transplant to be successful. However, this can not be applied here. One explanation for this is that the patient (and her parents who are making the decisions) is of sound mind and has capacity. They are fully aware of the risks and benefits of undergoing the kidney transplant without the Covid-19 vaccine.

As we discussed in class, there are ways to optimize a patient's health despite not following the provider's initial plan. Beneficence is not thrown out the window here and must be employed appropriately given the scenario. Therefore, proper care must be taken to promote Yulia's health and to protect her from illness and infection. Yulia's increased risk of becoming sick after the surgery and having an unsuccessful transplant may be reason for some to argue that autonomy should not be exercised. It is important to note that hospital's can not regulate their services based on their interpretation of the best candidates for surgeries. It would be unjust to withhold treatment.

The case presented challenges the ethical conduct of PAs. Although both autonomy and beneficence seemingly can be applied in this scenario, autonomy must be the ruling principle. As PAs it is imperative that we honor the patient's preference and adhere to their wishes. While Yulia Hicks was forced to find a different hospital willing to do her transplant, it should not have been so. We must reinforce ethical conduct and always check ourselves to ensure that proper calculations are made to provide optimal care.

References

Dailymail.com, H. A. F. (2022, December 10). *North Carolina family of unvaccinated 14-year-old search for a Medical Center for kidney transplant*. Daily Mail Online.
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11523171/North-Carolina-family-unvaccinated-14-year-old-search-medical-center-kidney-transplant.html>

Mackey, M. (2022, December 10). *Teen denied kidney transplant because she's not vaccinated for COVID, say parents*. Fox News.
<https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/teen-denied-kidney-transplant-not-vaccinated-covid-parents>

North Carolina Public Radio By Colin Campbell. (2023, May 19). *NC House wants to ban vaccine mandates for transplant recipients*. WUNC.
<https://www.wunc.org/health/2023-05-11/nc-house-wants-to-ban-vaccine-mandates-for-transplant-recipients>

Okidi, O., Sharma, V., Piscoran, O., Biggins, F., Singh, R., & Augustine, T. (2022, October 27). *The altruistic elderly, a valuable but unrecognised kidney donor group. A case report of an 85-year-old unspecified kidney donor - BMC geriatrics*. BioMed Central.
<https://bmcgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12877-022-03511-8>

Ross, L. F. (2022, June). *Covid-19 vaccine refusal and organ transplantation*. American journal of kidney diseases : the official journal of the National Kidney Foundation.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8894498/>