



ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Issue #21

Medical Emergency or Vehicular Manslaughter?

Spring 1997

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends that diabetics check their blood-sugar daily. According to the ADA, each person is responsible for monitoring his/her glucose level and needs to check it before driving because if it falls below normal levels, the person will eventually black out. Steven H., age 33, has been a diabetic for 20 years. In May of 1996, Mr. H. blacked out and crashed his car into two other cars, killing a woman and seriously injuring her fiancée. Mr. H. told police that he had not seen a doctor in two years; regularly skipped breakfast after his morning insulin shot; and had not monitored his glucose level in the three days prior to the crash. He had no recollection of the last 18 miles he drove before crashing his car. His attorneys say that the crash was the result of a medical emergency and that he should not be blamed. Prosecutors have charged Mr. H. with misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter. If convicted, he faces up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

This case can be considered from the perspectives of individual ethics, institutional ethics, and societal ethics.

Respond to the statements below using the following scale:

1 Strongly Agree 2 Agree 3 Not Sure 4 Disagree 5 Strongly Disagree

Individual Issues	Institutional Issues	Societal Issues
1. Mr. H. had the right not to check his blood-sugar level. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	1. Mr. H.'s health care providers should have followed up with him to make certain he was checking his glucose level every day. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	1. If society starts placing blame for such incidents on people with medical conditions, people will be at greater risk because no one will admit to having such conditions. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
2. It was Mr. H.'s responsibility to check his blood-sugar level before driving, as recommended by the ADA. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	2. The DMV should have responsibility for making sure that persons with certain medical conditions are not granted a driver's license. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	2. There should be laws covering this type of behavior similar to the laws covering drunk driving. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
3. Mr. H. was not responsible for the crash because it was the result of a medical emergency. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	3. The ADA should be aggressive in promoting the safety of society over the interests of individual diabetics. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	3. Mr. H. should be charged with more than misdemeanor manslaughter. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
4. Mr. H. was responsible for the crash and should be prosecuted because he was negligent in not following the recommended course of treatment for his diabetes. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	4. The courts should step in and hold individuals accountable for irresponsible behavior such as Mr. H. displayed. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	4. Society should require physicians to report persons with diabetes to the DMV. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
5. Because of the potential harm to others, Mr. H. had a duty not to drive an automobile. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	5. Mr. H.'s auto insurance company should not have to pay for damage resulting from the crash. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	5. Cases such as this are best handled by public education and individual choice/ responsibility, not by criminal law. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5



**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**