



ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

Risks & Responsibility: Reporting Medical Errors

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Ben, a twelve year old boy, was brought into the emergency department with severe abdominal pain. A physician examined Ben, determined that he had classic signs of appendicitis, and recommended immediate surgery. Ben's parents consented to the surgery and Ben was operated upon. During the surgery, the surgeon discovered that Ben's appendix appeared normal. Following the surgery, the surgeon informed Ben and his parents that Ben's appendix had been removed and assured them that the surgery had been successful.

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

<i>Individual Issues</i>	<i>Institutional Issues</i>	<i>Societal Issues</i>
1. Ben's parents have a right to know that the surgery was not necessary. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	1. Unnecessary surgeries, once determined, should be automatically reported to and reviewed by the surgery committee. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	1. Healthcare professionals have a moral obligation to tell patients whenever an error occurs, regardless of how serious the consequence is. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
2. The surgeon has a professional responsibility to tell Ben's parents that Ben's appendix was normal and that surgery was not necessary after all. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	2. The ethics committee should facilitate development of policies on the ethical management of medical errors. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	2. Telling patients about errors which do not cause the patient harm will only contribute to increasing patients' distrust of the healthcare system. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
3. It is not necessary to tell Ben's parents because it will not change anything. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	3. Acquiring information about medical errors is part of the institution's moral obligation to improve quality of care and reduce risk to its patients. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	3. Patients should accept the fact that errors will occur in medicine. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
4. It would be necessary to tell Ben's parents only if Ben had been injured by having the surgery performed. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	4. Healthcare institutions have a moral obligation to inform patients about errors which occurred while the patient was in the institution's care. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	4. The federal government should be involved in regulating error in medicine, just as it is in the airline industry. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
5. Nurses who assisted with the surgery should file an incident report with risk management. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	5. The quality management department should be notified of an error and undertake a quality improvement effort to identify and improve the systems and processes which contributed to the error. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	5. The public has a right to know the overall error rate for healthcare institutions. <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.**