

The Ethical Dilemma of Dr. Gene Perelli

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The ethical dilemma case that I will be evaluating is the case of Dr. Gene Perelli. Dr. Perelli is a general dentist and has been for 15 years. It is important to him that he provides preventative education and management for his patients. Dr. Perelli faces an issue as a 35-year-old man comes into Dr. Perelli's office for treatment. The patient is an overall healthy man who is on diuretics for his high blood pressure. The patient also smokes three packs of cigarettes a day for the past 20 years. Dr. Perelli believes that this patient exhibits a "raspy" voice due to his smoking habit. After examination, Dr. Perelli believes the patient needs extractions of three carious third molars and periodontal treatment due to his moderate to localized severe chronic periodontitis. Dr. Perelli contemplates the treatment due to the patient's smoking habit. Dr. Perelli completes tobacco cessation for many of his patients and is successful. Dr. Perelli shares his concerns about the patient's smoking habit and that he believes smoking cessation would be very important for treatment. The patient tells the dentist that his habit is none of his business and states that he believes the dentist is a smoker. Although Dr. Perelli is careful to hide his smoking habit, he has been smoking two cigarette packs a day for 15 years. The patient is curious that if the dentist can't quit smoking why should he? The ethical dilemma in this case is that the dentist is telling the patient to do one thing but he, himself is not doing what he is recommending to his patients.

In this situation, the dentist has the options of lying to the patient and claiming that he doesn't smoke which risks the patient discovering the truth and losing the trust of the patient. On the other hand, if the dentist lies and the patient believes him, then the dentist is left with the guilt and burden of lying to his patient. Another choice is for the dentist to acknowledge that he smokes but tell the patient that it's not their concern.

This situation causes conflict within a few ethical principles. The ethical principles that are conflicted in this case are societal trust, beneficence, and veracity. I believe that societal trust is one of the biggest ethical conflicts. Societal trust is the principle that as professionals we ensure society's trust in our profession. This principle can be broken because the patient may not trust the dentist's recommendations due to his lack of following his own recommendation. In the case of the dentist lying and the patient knowing the actual truth and as well as if the dentist decides to lie to the patient and the patient believes him, societal trust is broken either way. If the dentist lies, the patient will either feel as if they cannot trust the dentist, and if the patient doesn't know that the dentist lies societal trust is still being broken because patients can't truly trust what the dentist is saying and recommending. It is important that healthcare workers truly believe in the advice they give and that their lifestyle correlates with their recommendations. Societal trust is crucial between healthcare providers and patients because patients often listen and interact more openly and honestly with healthcare workers they trust. When patients quit trusting dental professionals, they likely will quit getting treatment or won't listen to what the provider is recommending because they don't trust their advice. Societal trust can also be tested or broken if the dentist admits to smoking but tells the patient it is none of their business. If the dentist wants his patients to trust him and his recommendations, then he should be open and honest with his patients even if his habits contradict his advice. I feel that patients can be more understanding of something if they hear it directly from the source rather than from somewhere else. The principle of veracity, which means to tell the truth is also compromised in this situation. In this case, the dentist was lying about his smoking habit by keeping it a secret. In two scenarios, the dentist could lie to the patient stating that he does not smoke which would clearly violate the ethical principle of veracity. When veracity is broken, it creates a barrier between the provider and the

patient, causing a lack of trust. Veracity is crucial because if the patient discovers that the dentist is lying about smoking, the patient may begin to question what else the dentist could be lying about and doubt all previous and future medical advice. Beneficence means doing what will benefit a person and can be conflicted when the dentist's personal habits contradict the advice he gives to his patients. The patient may perceive that the dentist isn't doing what is best for him because if it was the best treatment, wouldn't the dentist be doing it for himself as well? In the scenario where the dentist lies and the patient knows he is lying, beneficence is broken. The patient knows that the dentist is lying and may not understand that if smoking is bad for his oral health, why hasn't the dentist chosen to quit? If the dentist lies and the patient is unaware of the lie, the dentist is the one faced with the conflict of the broken principle of beneficence. The patient may not know that the dentist isn't doing what will benefit himself the best, but the dentist should question and reflect on his own habits and their correlation to beneficence. Why would the dentist put his oral health in danger if he truly believes what he is telling his patients? If he doesn't believe the information about smoking that he tells his patients, why does he waste his time telling them to quit smoking?

Out of all the options, I feel that the least damaging choice, the one that breaks the least number of ethical principles and would cause the least amount of harm, would be the dentist telling the patient that he does smoke but that it is none of the patient's business. With this choice, the ethical principles of societal trust and beneficence are the main ethical principles that are tested and/or broken. Since the dentist is telling the patient that he does smoke, he is not lying therefore veracity is not broken. Societal trust and beneficence are broken in this case because the dentist is not following his own recommendation. The patient may feel hesitant to trust the dentist due to his conflict of personal habits and advice, but the patient may feel at ease with

knowing that although the dentist's habits are different, he is truthful and is not lying to his patients. In any of the scenarios, there is no perfect outcome. If the dentist lies, the patient may feel betrayed and never trust the dentist again. If the dentist tells the truth but says it is not the patient's business the patient may feel offended and not understand why the dentist is giving advice, he will not follow himself. I think the best choice would have been for the dentist to be open about his smoking habit in the first place and try to quit smoking himself so that when he is giving cessation advice to his patients he could speak from experience and show them that quitting is possible. This is a hard case to break down but ultimately the dentist must decide how important it is to him that his habits back his advice and education to his patients.

References