

# Ethics Test Cases

## Case 1:

A seventy-year old man has been lying in the hospital in a comatose state for 7 months. He is fed intravenously but does not require a respirator to keep breathing. Doctors hold out no serious hope that the patient will ever come out of this coma and regain his powers. One of the following decisions must be made:

- 1) continue present treatment, and any other treatment necessary, as long as the patient remains alive according to the accepted standards of death;
- 2) continue present treatment but make no special effort to save the patient if a new threat (such as pneumonia) arises;
- 3) feed the patient with only water and salt (to prevent dehydration) and allow him to starve to death painlessly;
- 4) continue present treatment provided that the patient serves a useful social purpose by being a suitable subject for medical experimentation.

Assume that the patient never expressed any wishes about what was to happen him if he ended up in this state. Also assume that he has no known relatives and no significant amount of money. Now, assume he's your grandfather. What should be done?

## Case 2:

A twenty-five year old man, driving a motorcycle, crashed into a road barrier. As a result, he suffers severe head injuries which impair his mental faculties and spinal injuries which assure paralysis for life. A series of very expensive and delicate operations over a period of several years offer a 50-50 chance of restoring fully the man's mental powers. Without the operations, the man will remain in a coma and die rather quickly. The man refused to wear a helmet and was driving recklessly at the time of the accident. Assume that he happens to be a very bright mathematician working with the space program. Is it acceptable to assert existence of an obligation to provide whatever funds or procedures are necessary to try to restore the man's mental powers?

## Case 3:

Researchers want to study the possibility of chromosome breakage in users of hallucinogenic drugs. Accordingly, they need blood and urine samples. Because of possible legal penalties for drug use, they cannot expect enough persons to volunteer to provide the samples. Since there are no risks involved, the researchers decide to use samples from students through routine tests at the University health center. They plan to take precautions so that identification of drug users through tests of their samples cannot be traced to individual students. Is it morally acceptable for researchers to get their blood and urine without consent?

## Case 4:

A Congresswoman is driving home after a hard day's campaigning for re-election. It is a tight race, and it is just one week before voting day. Ahead of her, she sees a man suddenly dart into the road and smash into the side of a passing car. The car, however, never stops. The man is lying in the road severely injured. No one else is around to give assistance or witness what happened. Having been an emergency room nurse for several years, she examines him briefly

and decides that the injuries assure almost certain death within 3 to 4 hours, regardless of the medical treatment received. He is unconscious and not experiencing any pain. She has devoted her adult life to various kinds of public service, and she has high hopes of serving the public even more in the future. She is well aware that two influential newspapers in her district oppose her re-election bid strongly and are not very scrupulous in their attempts to cast her in a bad light. She is also aware that her car has a new dent on the side, apparently caused by someone driving carelessly in the parking lot that afternoon. Is it morally acceptable for her to get back in her car and drive on?