DHYG 400 – Assignment 2, Interview Questions Courtenay Johnson

October 19, 2011 - Interview with: **Dr. Scott Henwick MD FRCPC**

**1. What is your profession and how long have you been doing it?**

Physician since 1985, Medical Microbiologist since 1994

**2. What made you want to go into your profession?**

Dr. Henwick liked the sciences, but did not want to work as a research scientist.

**3. Is there a ‘Code of Ethics’ that governs your profession? If so, do you ever refer to it for guidance of support?**

Yes, from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, as well as the Hippocratic Oath that all physicians take to ‘do no harm’.

**4. Can you tell me about an ethical dilemma/situation that you have encountered in your professional career?**

While completing his Residency at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Henwick was treating a 14 year old girl who was dying from end stage Rhabdomyosarcoma. She had been sick for several years, and was at the point where her body was shutting down, treatment was no longer working – chemotherapy and radiation had stopped working. Surgery was not an option, at this stage, because a metastatic tumour had spread throughout her entire body. The patient’s mother continuously begged the physicians to continue the heroic efforts – continue all treatment, do all that they could to save her girl. All of the medical staff on the girl’s case believed that further treatment would just torture the patient. Dr. Henwick’s ethical dilemma stemmed from honouring the request of the parent/guardian, or trying to persuade her to act in a way that she does not want to? Is it best to grant the mother’s wishes, and keep the patient alive at any cost, in spite of the pain/suffering it may prolong for the child? Or is it best to act in a way that you believe is in the best interest of the child, convincing the mother, as the person responsible for making health care decisions on behalf of her daughter, to go against what she wants?

**5a. How many people were involved with this particular ethical issue? Who?**

Dr. Henwick, the teenage patient, the mother, two or three nurses, a few other physicians who had been treating the patient for the duration of her battle with Cancer.

**5b. How many people were involved with coming to an ethical solution?**

As above.

**6. In the end, how was the issue resolved? Was everyone please with the outcome?**

One night, the patient went into respiratory arrest. Dr. Henwick was able to convince the mother that it was time to allow her daughter to pass naturally, and consent to a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order. Everyone was at peace with allowing the teenage girl to pass away naturally, and end her long-term suffering. However, when the patient initially went into arrest, a page went out to the anaesthesiologist on-call, who had never been involved in this patient’s case. Dr. Henwick spoke with him, advising him that the mother had changed her mind, and no longer wanted the physicians to resuscitate her daughter; so his services were no longer needed for this particular patient. The anaesthesiologist came anyway. He decided to have a conversation with the mother, and advised her that he could keep her daughter alive on a ventilator. Of course, the mother held on to this new hope, and decided to keep her daughter alive. She passed away three days later, never waking up, despite the anaesthetist’s heroic measures.

**7. How long did it take to resolve this dilemma?**

It took several weeks to a few months to convince the mother that stopping treatment was in her daughter’s best interest.

**8. Who would investigate and make the decision to hold you accountable if you were caught/reported for behaving unethically?**

The B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons.

However, if something were to happen in a hospital, there is also a Medical Advisory Committee which is responsible for ensuring physicians behave in an ethical manner.

**9. What might be the ramifications of an unethical act?**

- Suspension of your license

- Restrictions can be set on your license so you’re only able to work within certain parameters

- Can be centured (be fined, or be put on probation)

- May have to undergo special/ethical training

- Removed from the register (you can no longer work as a physician, all privileges are revoked

**10. What type of situation would compel you to report an unethical situation?**

If a patient were being harmed from the action(s) of a colleague. The act would have to be clearly unethical to himself, as well as to his peers, who he would consult.