

A Case Study in Ethics and Intentional Injury Prevention

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There is a difference between
what makes us feel better
and what improves health.

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Objective

- The objective of this session is to expose aspects of the health care system that may foster rather than hinder intentional injury prevention.

Consult

- Patient is a 29 year old female.
- Form 1 = Involuntary Admission.
- Recurrent admissions post drinking alcohol and antifreeze
- Required hemodialysis in the Intensive Care Unit

Self-Harm

- **Alcohol and Antifreeze**
- Antifreeze poisoning can produce dramatic and dangerous toxicity. Renal failure, acidosis and hypocalcemia may result from ingesting antifreeze. There can be widespread tissue injury in the kidney, brain, liver, and blood vessels. The result can be fatal.
- The treatment for antifreeze poisoning is alcohol and hemodialysis which removes the antifreeze and its toxic metabolites from the blood.

Diagnosis

- Borderline Personality Disorder also called Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder.
 - BPD is a personality disorder defined in DSM-IV and described as a prolonged disturbance of personality function in a person characterized by depth and variability of moods. The disorder typically involves unusual levels of instability in mood; black and white thinking, splitting, chaotic and unstable relationships, etc.
 - These disturbances can have a pervasive negative impact on many or all of the psychosocial facets of life. This includes maintaining relationships in work, home, and social settings. Self-harming is a marked symptom and even attempts at or suicide itself are possible, especially without proper care and effective therapy.

Treatment

- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
 - DBT is a system of therapy originally developed to treat persons with borderline personality disorder. DBT combines standard cognitive-behavioral techniques for emotion regulation and reality-testing with concepts of mindful awareness, distress tolerance, and acceptance.
 - DBT is offered on an outpatient basis.

Hospital Processes

1. The patient would present at the emergency department via ambulance or some other method.
2. She would claim to have ingested alcohol and then to drinking antifreeze.
3. Emergency management of her condition would commence and she would be transferred to the Intensive Care Unit.
4. Intensive Care Unit would conduct hemodialysis and manage her other symptoms.
5. Intensive Care Unit would then consult Psychiatry, which would accept the patient.
6. Upon accepting the patient psychiatry would immediately discharge the patient and make arrangements for the initiating of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy on an outpatient basis.
7. The patient would not participate in the DBT and would ingest alcohol and antifreeze again.
8. This occurred 6 times in 6 weeks.

Ethical Issues

1. No treatment in medicine is 100% effective.
2. This patient is not responding to DBT.
3. It is not reasonable to involuntarily detain this patient indefinitely, it won't cure her disease.
4. What is plan B for treating patients with BPD when DBT does not work?
5. Simply because this patient does not fit into the 'boxes' we have developed in our system does not mean that we can "ethically" let her fall through the cracks.
6. At least 10% of people with BPD eventually complete suicide successfully.
7. If we don't do something for this patient she will eventually die.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, we ended up blaming the patient for her behaviour.



Thank You!