Reviewer’s report

Title: Ethics in paramedic services: A communicative challenge in patient interaction

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Reviewer: clare delany

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This is a very interesting case study and would likely be of relevance to paramedics. I don’t think the title quite captures the essence of the case and the discussion. Alternative titles could be something along the lines of:

Can patients refuse paramedic’s advice or treatment?. Or Should paramedics ever accept patients’ refusal of treatment or further assessment?

There are some slight grammatical (expression) errors but they do not impact on the clarity of the discussion. In general, my comments are focused on the ethical analysis of this case, and I make some suggestions as to how the ethical issues (from a theoretical position) about the meaning of patient autonomy and (from a more practical perspective) relating to the paramedic/patient encounter could be further elaborated and refined. In some ways my comments are not so much a critique of the paper as a response/discussion arising from the paper—and eliciting further reflection and debate is no doubt, a goal of case studies such as these.

The abstract does not mention the fact that the patient was about to board a plane and this seems to be an important component of the context of this case and I wonder whether this should be in the abstract.

In the abstract and then in the conclusion, the issue of ‘looking forward’ to the consequences of the actions is suggested as a good ethical strategy. However I would argue that, in this case, it turned out to be a good strategy because the woman was satisfied with the paramedic’s actions but (as the author points out), the strategy of looking forward may not have resulted in a conclusion that satisfied the woman and she may equally have complained that because of the paternalistic actions of the paramedic, ‘her career has been ruined…”

So my point here, is that suggesting that the strategy of looking forward is—I agree-- ethically sound but not for the reasons suggested by the author. Instead—it is important to ‘look forward’ because paramedics have an ethical obligation to be able to provide moral justification for their actions. Asking the woman to consider the potentially harmful consequences of the risk she wanted to take for herself and for her family, assisted in the woman’s autonomous deliberations. So the paramedic was in fact respecting the woman’s autonomous choices by ensuring she had sufficient information to make those choices.
This case is an example of an ethical dilemma where paramedics’ ethical obligations to benefit, not cause harm and respect a person’s autonomous wishes are in conflict. Therefore the discussion could more explicitly state this conflict and also refer (perhaps) to paramedics’ ethical obligations in general terms and how this particular case highlights the complexity of deciding what to do when one principle needs to override the other.

The process of choosing a 3rd option identified in this case provides an example of how the paramedics sought to minimize the harmful effects of potentially overriding the woman’s stated autonomous wishes. The 3rd option involved ‘probing her understanding of her decision’ and identifying other potential harms she may not have considered. The real challenge that this case does not discuss, but could, is what if the woman still refused. What should the paramedic then do? This may not be finally answered in the discussion, but it probably should be posed to further encourage debate and discussion about this issue.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

NO