Denise Manning 619 Special Project

"A Pennsylvania hospital is faced with a non-U.S. born 5 year-old daughter of undocumented immigrants who has a life-threatening need for a 2 million dollar heart transplant. The family is uninsured and is without the financial resources to pay for the transplant independently. Using critical analysis and your ethics knowledge render and defend a decision about whether to place the girl on the hospital's transplant list. There are laws about organ transplantation already on the books. However, this question is about the 'ought' over the is and thus, this question asks you to render an ethical decision despite the specific law that has been created about this."

The Hospital’s Position

As a member of the hospital’s ethics board I am against giving the five year old daughter of undocumented immigrants a 2 million dollar heart transplant.

It would be unfair to burden a family that has no financial resources with a bill that only outlines the upfront costs. The heart transplant is 2 million but that does not include the additional costs that come with the transplant and what complications may come for a young girl. I believe that ethically it would be immoral to advise the hospital to take the heart transplant money risk.

The Ethic of Care principle states that “finding a solution that avoids harming anyone or that minimizes harm to all involved and that promotes caring in a situation” (28). I believe that this principle supports not providing the uninsured family with the surgery as to avoid harm. It would be more moral for the young girl and family to make her as comfortable as possible before she passes away. It reduces the harm that can come to all involved. The young girl would not be put through a painful surgery and recovery as well as the family not having to foot the much higher bill the transplant would cost. The young girl would be cared for and surrounded by loved ones when the end comes.

In Rawlsian Ethics it notes that “inequalities are inevitable but can be justified and minimized” (24). It may be considered ethically unfair that undocumented uninsured members of society should not receive a heart transplant due to cost but it can be justified. In not being able to afford the surgery I am acknowledging that inequalities exist but the denial of the surgery is for the better. Debtor’s prison is real and for those that are undocumented times are incredibly insecure. Authorities are looking for reasons to deport undocumented immigrants. If the family is not in debt for a costly bill and rehab the daughter would be allowed to pass peacefully. The families’ cost would be minimized and ethically the daughter would be well cared for until death.

In Kantian Ethicsemotions do not have a place in ethical decision making. Kantian ethics are “grounded in reason, not in tradition, intuition, conscience, emotion, or attitudes such as sympathy” (20). If emotions are taken into consideration this girl would be first on the list. She’s five of course she can live a long live after the heart transplant if there are no complications but there are other children in need to that can afford the surgery. Those with insurance, at least, can have access to payment plans and hospital assistance. More so than a family that has no direct ties to the United States. It may seem unfair but healthcare is a business and emotions can not be relied upon. It would be wrong to give the young girl the surgery because I feel badly.

The Utilitarianism ethical principle is the most controversial in supporting my decision not to give the five year old girl a heart transplant. Under this ethical principle the “actions are right if they produce the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness” (22). If the young girl dies it would make the family unhappy but so would debt and deportation. It could be noted that without the surgery the young girl can avoid years of pain and possible complications. The greatest happiness can be considered the young girl living peacefully in Heaven with the Lord (if that is what they choose to believe). When a loved one dies the family and community mourn but can take comfort that there is no more pain to be had. She and the family would have the greatest balance of happiness to unhappiness.

Ethically the young girl should not receive the heart transplant for the ethical reasons listed above. As a representative of the hospital this decision is final. The hospital will do its best, with applicable resources, to keep the young girl comfortable until death. The family can then make recommendations for her burial.