

## **Surrogate Refusal**

### **School of Medicine Case - Transition to Residency – Professionalism, Ethics & Law**

Mr. Holland is a 52-year-old man who is flown to OHSU by Life Flight after the car he was driving slid into a bridge abutment. He struck the steering wheel with such force that the trauma team is concerned about the possibility of a dissecting aortic aneurysm. On arrival in the emergency department he is able to provide basic medical information and asks the team to contact his wife. Mr. Holland says he has never been hospitalized and states that he is a Christian Scientist. He then becomes more lethargic and is sent to radiology for an emergent CT angiogram. On arrival at the angiogram suite, he is too lethargic to sign the consent form. His wife is en route to the hospital and cannot be reached.

The radiologist proceeds with the angiogram, with the surgical trauma service standing by. As anticipated, a dissecting aortic aneurysm is confirmed. The trauma team begins making arrangements to take Mr. Holland directly to surgery from the angiography suite. Mrs. Holland arrives and shows appropriate concern for her husband's condition. She is shown the angiogram and asked to consent to emergency surgery for her husband. The surgeon feels that her husband has nearly 100% chance of dying without surgery and excellent odds of recovery if he has the surgery immediately. To the trauma team's surprise, she declines permission for the surgery, saying that they are Christian Scientists and that she wants her husband immediately transferred to the Canterbury Christian Science Center for prayer therapy. The trauma team tries to talk to the patient and he mumbles that he wants to go to Canterbury.

- 1. What is the key dilemma in this case? What are the important facts?**
- 2. What are the relevant ethical and legal principles?**
- 3. Who can speak for Mr. Holland? What if you suspect the surrogate isn't acting in the patient's best interests?**
- 4. What would you do, and what words would you say to Mrs. Holland?**

Suppose that the Hollands' 12-year-old son was also in the car and injured. He is found to have a ruptured spleen and is becoming hypotensive despite aggressive fluid replacement.

- 5. Is the decision process different for a child?**