

Virtual Mentor

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CASE AND COMMENTARY

Renewing a Prescription for a Relative

Commentary by Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Case

Ann is completing her internship year at a major teaching hospital. Her brother Michael, who lives 100 miles away in a rural setting in the same state, has been seeing a psychiatrist for anxiety disorder and depression and has been taking medication for his illness. Without the medication, he would have severe panic attacks that would force him to avoid most social situations as well as experience episodic bouts of severe depression. Michael is almost at the end of his medication and learns that his psychiatrist is out of town on vacation. He decides to call his sister and ask her to call in a prescription refill. Ann readily complies, feeling that her brother's circumstances warrant her to use her status and authorize the prescription refill.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think of Ann's reasoning? [1-3]
2. Is it ethically appropriate for physicians to treat their immediate family members? [4,5]

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in Opinion 8.19 Self-treatment or treatment of immediate family members. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

Audiey Kao, MD, PhD is editor in chief of *Virtual Mentor*.

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