

## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **CASE AND COMMENTARY**

#### **Commemorative Issue: Renewing a Prescription for a Relative**

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#### **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 and to 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 telephones his sister and asks her to call in a prescription refill. Ann readily complies, believing 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? What other options does she have? Is she putting her brother Michael in any danger by refilling his prescription?
2. Would the situation be different if Michael were Ann's friend? Does the type of illness or medication make a difference?
3. Why is it considered unethical for physicians to treat their immediate family members?

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

*The people and events in this case are fictional. Resemblance to real events or to names of people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The viewpoints expressed on this site are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.*

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