

ART OF MEDICINE

When Good Women Decide to Do Nothing

Phoebe Cohen

Abstract

Many health professions students struggle with deciding whether and when to challenge their teachers. This graphic memoir, *When Good Women Do Nothing*, conveys what happened one day in the life of a paramedic student called to help an incarcerated, handcuffed woman in labor who gave birth on a stretcher. The memoir documents numerous clinical and ethical disagreements and decision points throughout the paramedic team's time with this patient.

Figure. Detail From *When Good Women Do Nothing*



([Click here](#) to view the entire graphic narrative.)

Media

Pen and ink and watercolor.

Once, as a paramedic student, I assisted an incarcerated woman who was in labor. She gave birth handcuffed to my stretcher. My duty to be a patient advocate conflicted with my duty to obey law enforcement protocol, and I haven't forgotten how that conflict felt

as I made decisions about what to do that day. My graphic memoir, *When Good Women Do Nothing*, documents the numerous disagreements and decision points throughout our paramedic team's time with this patient.

I obeyed my preceptor's orders while our patient labored feet from where we stood. I did not stand up to his authority and demand that her left hand be uncuffed as she struggled through her contractions. I was like many health professions students who struggle with deciding whether and when to challenge their teachers. I did make a decision at one point to close a curtain to offer our patient privacy from my preceptor's gaze.

My closing the curtain was a critical ethical action in our intervention and perhaps suggests that I didn't really do "nothing," as the title of the memoir suggests. This is 1 of 2 panels of the graphic memoir with no words. The visual in this panel is divorced from the narrative of the graphic memoir, and I'll let readers decide whether and to what extent this disconnect emphasizes my decision's and action's importance in the care of this patient.

Phoebe Cohen has walked many paths in life, including living in the middle of the Gobi Desert as a Peace Corps Volunteer and working as a paramedic in several states. She has also been drawing cartoons since she was 8 and has occasionally been known to go for up to 5 hours without coffee.

Citation

AMA J Ethics. 2019;21(10):E902-903.

DOI

10.1001/amajethics.2019.902.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The author(s) had no conflicts of interest to disclose.

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.