

Virtual Mentor

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CASE AND COMMENTARY

Student Dating of Patients' Relatives

Commentary by Faith Lagay, PhD

Case

John, a third-year medical student, is currently doing a pediatrics rotation. One of the patients he has seen is Nicholas, a 3-year-old with a chronic ear infection. John has seen Nicholas several times during his rotation. Nicholas' 25-year-old mother, Paula, appreciates the care her son has received from the attending physician and John. Paula is single and a student at a local community college. John feels that he and Paula have some "chemistry" and would like to ask her out on a date. John realizes that it is unethical for a physician to have a sexual relationship with a patient, but he thinks that asking Paula out is harmless. Even if their relationship should develop into something sexual, John thinks there is no harm in that because his role is that of a medical student and the patient is Nicholas and not his mother.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think of John's reasoning?
2. Do you think there is a potential problem here?

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in Opinion 8.145 Sexual or romantic relations between physicians and key third parties. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

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