

Case 9 ♦ No Black Nurses

On Halloween 2012 at the Hurley Medical Center in Flint, Michigan, a man asked hospital staff to ensure that a black nurse, Tonya Battle, not touch his newborn baby. As a nurse in the neonatal intensive care unit, Battle had been routinely caring for the newborn. Upon seeing this, the man reportedly became agitated, rolled up his sleeve to reveal a swastika tattoo, and insisted to a shift supervisor that Battle not touch his child. The next day Battle arrived to work to find that she had been reassigned and a note placed prominently on the assignment chart reading “No African-American nurse to take care of baby.”¹

The director of nurses, Mary Osika, made the decision to comply with the father’s request and maintained that the directive was issued in an attempt to ensure that the child was able to receive medical care. The staff was concerned that if the request were not met, the child would be removed from the facility against medical advice with physical harm a likely result. The hospital’s administration further argued that the reassignment of Battle and other African American nurses was meant to protect them from contact with an aggressive racist.

After about a month, the hospital reversed its decision, characterizing its temporary compliance as an “initial evaluation” of the request. Battle and three other African-American nurses have since filed discrimination lawsuits, alleging that the Hurley Medical Center created a hostile work environment.²

Case from the 2013 Regional Ethics Bowl. Copyright, Association for Practical and Professional Ethics.

<http://appeonline.com/ethics-bowl/regional-ethics-bowl/>

¹ JoNel Aleccia, “Hospital Granted Dad’s Request: No Black Nurses, Lawsuit Says,” NBC News, February 19, 2013, <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/hospital-granted-dads-request-no-black-nurses-lawsuit-says-1C8436588>

² Jeff Karoub, “Tanya Battle, Michigan Nurse’s, Discrimination Suit Reveals Medicine’s ‘Open Secret’,” The Huffington Post, February 22, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/22/tanya-battle-michigan-nurse-discrimination-suit_n_2744546.html