

Case 7

Dr. Thomas Daley was happy to see Kelly Patterson. He had been following her budding acting career through the local community newspaper. A 17-year-old high school senior, she would be graduating in a few months and heading off to the state university to major in theatre. He recalls the shy, reclusive girl she was before her rhinoplasty some years ago. Although Kelly's mother was initially leery of a nose job for her then 11-year-old daughter, she and Kelly were desperate to put an end to the merciless teasing by other children about her nose. According to Mrs. Patterson, plastic surgery on Kelly's nose dramatically improved her self-confidence. "She just became a different person, so much more outgoing," her mother said, "it made such a big difference in her social life."

Kelly and her mother entered Dr. Daley's office and made small talk for a minute or so. Dr. Daley then asked Kelly about her reason for the appointment. Kelly looked at her mother and then said that she had been doing research on the internet about breast augmentation surgery and would like to undergo the procedure. Dr. Daley first assured Kelly that she was perfect the way she was. He then expressed some reservations about performing the procedure and sent the Pattersons away with some informational booklets that detail risks and side-effects of breast augmentation surgery.

Later that month, Dr. Daley found himself at the conference on plastic surgery, talking informally to another plastic surgeon, Dr. Sarah Carlson. He recounted to Dr. Carlson his discussion with Kelly and Mrs. Patterson, and then added that, although he does not doubt that she is sharp enough to understand the factual complexities about the breast augmentation procedure, he still, nonetheless, felt morally uncomfortable with Kelly's request. Dr. Carlson confessed that in southern California, where she practiced, it was not uncommon for girls Kelly's age to undergo breast augmentation surgery. "Besides Tom," she said, "if you're ethically uncomfortable with performing the surgery, you can just tell her that you won't do it, that she'll have to find someone else." Dr. Patterson nodded and pointed out that where he practices, most plastics surgeons refuse to do breast augmentations on adolescents.

A few weeks later, Dr. Daley met with Kelly and her mom. They discussed the procedure in detail. Kelly's remarks and questions reflected a thorough understanding of the risks and side-effects of the procedure.

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