Can a Veterinary Surgeon treat a human patient to save a life?- an ethical dilemma

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"Many states' 'Good Samaritan' laws protect dentists, vets, and so forth from being sued for failing to save someone they're forced to treat in an emergency, in the absence of a more appropriately-trained physician." – Andrew Grimm Nov 28 '12 at 20:18

There is an attempt to link allopathic medicine with Ayurveda, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) with a view to provide them with the required qualification to practice allopathic medicine. There is also suggestion to link dentistry with allopathy. This is done to provide enough health practitioners to meet the needs of the patients in rural areas as well to curb the practice of quackery. The only subject that is left out appears to be Veterinary Medicine.1

Good Samaritan is one who tries to help a human patient in an emergency situation who has a requisite basic training without a medical degree. Veterinary Medicine’s first two years of training is reported to be similar to what Medical students undergo. Rather the surgical skills of a veterinarian is more than a MBBS graduate. It was suggested by a Dean of Veterinary College of Medicine ,USA that in rural areas where primary care physicians are not available with additional training a veterinarian may be allowed to give rudimentary care to patients. 2

But there is a gray area between practice and violation. 3Violation of Medical practice can render veterinarian liable for legal action. This elicits a question whether a Veterinarian can treat a human patient.

In one of the episodes of “Kullfi Kumarr Bajewala”, Indian television series, a veterinarian is forced to treat a lady patient with heart attack and saves the patient.4

Kulfi is a seven year old kid and a gifted singer. She lands up in Mumbai in search of her father after her mother’s death. Kulfi lives in the same flat where her father Sikander lives who is a very famous singer along with his daughter and wife. Kulfi does not know that Sikander is her father. Sikander’s wife wants her child Amyra to become a singer and launches her with the help of a famous sponsor. She finds out that Kulfi sings very well. She records her voice and song and uses that to launch her daughter. Sikander comes to know that his daughter has been launched by using the song and voice of Kulfi. He does not want his daughter to face the consequences of such a falsehood. He wants that the sponsor must know the truth. He forces Kulfi to sing in front of the sponsor with a view to bring credit to Kulfi which was accorded to his own daughter. Sikander talks to his daughter about falsehood and wants her walk on right path of life. She gets a shock of her life for she along with her mother does not wants the truth to be revealed. In the process she starts hating the father and ill treats him. When her mother comes to know of the attempt by Sikander to reveal the real identity of the singer she influences Kulfi to negate the request by crediting the song to her daughter by continually being the ghost voice of Amyra, her daughter. But Sikander forces Kulfi to go along with him to launch her song in a Radio Station where Kulfi fails him with a bad performance. Sikander feeling betrayed scolds and asks Kulfi to get out of the house. For the sake of the Sinkander’s family she leaves the house which is witnessed by Amyra’s grandmother. She with a shoulder pain follows her asking her not to go. In the process she falls down with an heart attack. Kulfi seeing the grandmother falling down she rushes to her. Somehow manages to take her to hospital with the help of a cart puller to a hospital which bears the symbol of a hospital. She finds out it is an animal or pet care hospital. The veterinarian refuses to treat her. Kulfi appeals to his conscience that it is no harm to save a patient from death by treating her. Veterinarian treats the patient and saves her.

The serial is a very popular with world wide audience. The emotional component of the serial has a great influence on the viewers. This raises a question and an ethical dilemma, can a veterinarian treat a human patient in such a condition to save the patient from dying.

On a moral ground what the Veterinarian has done is right to save a life and may on a legal issue be considered as a violation of Medical Council of India, Act. It also raises a question whether a MBBS doctor treat a pet in case of emergency. 4-5

Ethics may be considered as the study personal choices that may have consequences. Morality , on the other hand may question the action as right or wrong. These are checks and balances to make the practice of Medicine and Allied Sciences efficient within the ambit of code of conduct of practice of health sciences.

References:

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