

SAMPLE VIGNETTES

Vignette #1

A woman moves here from another country and is seeking a new physician. She learns about a local doctor who is from the same country and is the same religion, and she calls his office to become a new patient. She speaks with a member of the office staff and makes an appointment. Two days later the doctor calls her and tells her that he does not see female patients from their culture and religion because of his religious beliefs. He tells her that a woman from their culture should only seek care from female providers, in case her medical condition requires her to take off her clothes. She realizes that he must be very religiously conservative, as this was never an issue in their home country.

Questions:

- Is it ethical for the doctor to refuse to see this woman?
- Would it be acceptable to refuse to see a patient because of sex? race? religion? sexual orientation? type of insurance (private vs. Medicaid)? immigration status? occupation? lifestyle?
- What principles can guide a physician's decision about who to see and who to turn away?

Vignette #2

A second-year medical student is applying for a summer research position. The research program director found a number of discrepancies on the student's curriculum vitae. Specifically, in her list of publications only 1 of 6 could be confirmed. The program director spoke with the student, who denied any deliberate dishonesty, contending "it was just sloppiness." OME is contacted about the student's application and begins its own investigation. OME staff discover that most of these publications were also listed on the student's medical school application. They also determine that her volunteer work was grossly exaggerated and that she did not actually belong to the honor society listed on her application. The administration agrees that she probably would not have been accepted without these things, although she seems to be proceeding well in medical school. She has not failed any courses and there have not been any allegations of unprofessional conduct prior to this.

Questions:

- What obligations does the university have (to this student, to other students, to the profession, and to society) to do something with this new information?
- What harm has come from this student's actions?
- What should be done?

Vignette #3

A woman in need of open heart surgery asks her surgeon to make sure that there are no African-American men in the operating room at the time of the surgery. She and her husband do not want an

African-American man looking at her nude body. The couple is unwilling to agree to the surgery unless the surgeon agrees to accommodate this request, and they tell him that he is their last hope. The

surgeon agrees to these terms, concerned that otherwise she will not undergo this potentially life-saving procedure.

On the day of the operation, an African-American male perfusionist is assigned to operate the heart-lung bypass machine. The surgeon quietly asks him to leave, and replaces him with a Caucasian technician.

Questions:

- Was the surgeon's conduct appropriate?
- Should a patient have the right to request members of a specific race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnic group to give them care?
- How else could the surgeon have handled this situation?

Vignette #4

An intelligent and articulate minority student enjoys participating in the discussions that take place in his SBM group. He is always well-prepared and his comments are supported by the research he has done prior to class. As the semester progresses, he feels that his comments are being more closely scrutinized than those provided by his classmates. He is repeatedly asked to report his sources and defend everything he says. After a few weeks he notices that this scrutiny only comes from one other student in the group, who is Caucasian. In addition, he realizes that she frequently cuts him off in the middle of the discussion. She does not seem to do this to other members of the group.

Questions:

- Is this a case of racism/discrimination?
- What should the student do about this unequal treatment? How should other students in the group react?
- At what point does discrimination or different treatment become extreme enough to warrant being addressed?
- We all have biases. What can we do to prevent these biases from making us act inappropriately?