Carol Mason

Dr. Joe Wilkins delivered Carol Mason’s first daughter three years ago, and her second daughter is due in six weeks. Mrs. Mason’s pregnancy has been uncomplicated so far. At her last regular check-up a month ago, Mrs. Mason, who is now 33, asked whether Dr. Wilkins would “tie her tubes” at the time of the delivery. Dr. Wilkins agreed to do so.

At this visit, Mrs. Mason brings up the topic again and requests that Dr. Wilkins not tell her husband, John, about the tubal ligation. “I know he would like to have more children and really wants a son,” she explained.

“You’re my patient, and there is no reason for me to tell your husband,” Dr. Wilkins replies, “but you should think about the consequences of not telling him. He’ll expect you to become pregnant again and wonder why you’re not.”

“I know, but I don’t want any more children. I’m establishing a career that’s important to me. John and I have had this conversation a dozen times, and it goes nowhere. The bottom line is, it’s my body and I don’t want any more children.”


LESSON 2: CONFIDENTIALITY Supplementary “cases”

For each situation described below, circle the most suitable description:

0 - No breach of confidentiality
1 - Trivial breach of confidentiality
2 - Significant breach of confidentiality
3 - Serious breach of confidentiality

A. Over supper, a doctor tells his/her spouse about some of the
patients seen in the clinic during the afternoon, identifying some of these patients. 0123

B Medical students discuss ‘a case’ in the hospital elevator. Other people (strangers to the students) are in the elevator. 0123

C A receptionist for a family practice physician sees that a neighbor has had an appointment with the physician. Suspecting the neighbor is pregnant, and wishing to congratulate her, she looks in the notes. 0123

D You visit a friend of yours in the hospital two days after she has had a baby. On the door of her single room there is a notice: ‘barrier nursing’. You ask a nurse if you can go in the room. “Oh yes” she replies “she’s a hepatitis carrier, but there is no risk”. 0123

E A friend of yours tells you something personal about him/herself ‘in strict confidence’. You tell another friend of yours telling him/her to tell no one else. 0123

F In the ‘clinical details’ section of a blood form you write ‘? Alcohol abuse’. The form is placed in a routine transparent envelope together with a blood sample. The staff member who takes the blood to the laboratory notices that the sample is from someone he knows, and sees your ‘clinical details’. 0123

G The phone rings on the floor. You answer it. The caller asks how a particular patient is doing. Since you know the patient, you tell the caller that the patient has pneumonia on top of chronic bronchitis and that IV antibiotics have been started. On putting the phone down, a nurse asks who called. You don’t know. 0123

Adapted from The Oxford Practice Skills Manual (Oxford, 1996)