DEALING WITH RACIST PATIENTS

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Disclosures

No conflicts of interest
Case

You are the provider preparing to see a Caucasian woman patient in the ED for cellulitis and substance use disorder.

As you enter the room, you notice that she is quite agitated. While trying to begin your evaluation, she suddenly shouts “I don’t want any n*ggers taking care of me.”
How do you feel as the Provider?

• You don’t want to make it seem like you can’t handle it, so don’t bring it up to anyone

• This patient is actually sick and really needs care. Confronting her may make things worse and make care more difficult

• You kind of hate this patient and don’t really care what happens to her at this point

How do you feel as the Ally?

• What is going on with the patient that they would speak that bluntly?

• How can you best support that provider without making them feel worse?

• Angry and offended on the provider’s behalf

• What is the billing code for this in the EMR?
Five Ethical & Practical Factors

1. Medical Condition
2. Decision Making Capacity
3. Reason for Request
4. Options for Responding
5. Impact on Providers

5 Ethical and Practical Factors

1. Patient medical condition
   • If unstable, treat

2. Decision-making capacity
   • Rule out delirium, dementia or psychosis

5 Ethical and Practical Factors

3. Reasons for the request
   • Ethically appropriate, occasionally. i.e. language concordance, history of discrimination.
   • Rarely PTSD, i.e. veterans

4. Options for Responding to the Request

- **Accommodate**: Ask another provider to take over the care of the patient. See if there is a family member or other proxy you can partner with.

- **Negotiate**: I just want to see the arm and then I am gone.

- **Place limits**: You cannot use that language here.

- **Transfer**: Offered only to stable patients and by attending physician discretion.

5 Ethical and Practical Factors

5. Effect on Physician/Providers

- **No absolute ethical duty**

- Reasonable limits can and should be placed on unacceptable patient behavior.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Patients have the right to refuse medical care.
  • Informed consent/battery law/EMTALA all protect patients

Medical providers have employment rights
  • Workplace free from discrimination/Title VII, 1964 Civil Rights Act

Common Remarks/Situations

What are you?
Are you here to take my tray?
Can I please speak to the real doctor?
But, where are you really from?
Sorry I can’t seem to tell you and your colleague apart
TAKE AWAYS

- Racist comments happen

- Allies have an important role to play
  - You do not always have to accommodate
  - You can set limits
  - You can inform patients of their right to seek care elsewhere

- It’s ok not to react perfectly - just remember to act!

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