

Ethical Dilemma: Aunt Abigail is visiting your home with cousin Caroline for the week. The 2nd day after arriving, Aunt Abigail says she is having a headache and backache. She usually gets this when she travels. Her primary doctor usually gives her some Lortab and a muscle relaxer and she is better in a few days. Since you are a nurse practitioner, she asks if you could call her in a few so their trip is not ruined. What do you do and tell Aunt Abigail? Is there an ethical dilemma? Why or why not?

Reply:

No matter what position one may hold in the medical field there is a chance for an ethical dilemma to occur. Family members and/or acquaintances will attempt to use your status for their personal gain. An ethical dilemma occurs when there is conflict in an individual's principles, duties, rights, beliefs or values with another (Beauchamp and Childress, 2008). Therefore, I would consider Aunt Abigail asking me for treatment as an ethical dilemma, because she is not a current patient in my practice. Providing treatment to a family member and/or acquaintance that are not currently a patient in your practice can become risky. You are now treating them based on their "thoughts and word" and not your physical assessment of that person. In addition, this could create a personal conflict. The NP could over treat or undertreat a person due to their personal relationship to the family member or acquaintance

In addition, Aunt Abigail is asking for a controlled substances. In the state of Alabama, nurse practitioners (NP) are not allowed to prescribe such medication. I would make Aunt Abigail aware of the NPs scope of practice and refer her to an Urgent Care clinic or a physician for further treatment.

References

Beauchamp, T. and Childress, J. (2008). *Principles of biomedical ethics* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.