



Ethical Dilemma: Child's Lung Transplant

Student Example



Facts of the case:

- ▶ Little girl in Pennsylvania has end-stage cystic fibrosis.
- ▶ Doctors say that a lung transplant is her last hope at survival.
- ▶ Transplant policy says that she can only receive lungs from another child, not an adult.
- ▶ There is a much smaller number of children's lungs available compared to adults.
- ▶ Her doctors say that they're confident the transplant will be successful.



Ethical Problem:

- ▶ Under transplant policy, doctors are were not allowed to give adult lungs to a child under 12. (this policy has now been changed to a case-by-case exception).
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Stakeholders:

- ▶ Sarah Murnaghan – the little girl receiving the lung transplant.
- ▶ Sarah's doctors
- ▶ Sarah's parents
- ▶ Future children under 12 seeking a lung transplant when children's lungs are not available.
- ▶ The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network
- ▶ The Federal Government – created contract that allocates organs to certain candidates.



Values at Stake:

- ▶ Saving one life over another.
 - ▶ Violating a transplant policy under contract with the federal government.
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How it was Resolved and the Outcome:

- ▶ A federal judge issued a restraining order to prevent the age-restriction policy to be enforced in Sarah's case.
- ▶ Sarah received the adult lungs and can now breathe on her own.
- ▶ There is now a permanent change to the policy, allowing some children under 12 to receive adult lungs, depending on the circumstances.



How it could have been avoided and what I would have done:

- ▶ I don't think this could have been avoided because no matter what there are going to be more people needing lung transplants than there are available.
- ▶ I think the policy in place before it was modified had good reasoning for not providing adult lung transplants to younger children because of the risk of rejection.
- ▶ In this situation I would have fought for the policy to make an exception with the knowledge that her doctors were sure her life would be saved.
- ▶ I think that the resolution that came out one year later that involved exceptions like Sarah's case being able to receive adult lungs was a good way of dealing with the dilemma.