

## 14. Shhhh!

Teddy is a nurse who works at a small hospital. One of his patients, Carol, is a terminally ill woman on life support. Over the past week, Carol's health has rapidly declined; even with the aid of life support she is expected to live no more than a week. Since Carol does not have an advanced directive specifying what to do in these circumstances, the decision of whether to take her off life support now or to keep her on life support is left up to her remaining family—her two children. Her daughter thinks that it would be best to remove her from life support rather than prolong any suffering that she might be experiencing. Her son disagrees. He thinks that Carol's grandchildren—both his and his sister's kids—should have the opportunity to spend as much time with their grandmother as possible before she passes away.

On this particular day, Carol's daughter and son get into an argument about what they ought to do. As the argument gets more heated, their voices are raised and can be heard by the other people in the unit, including other critically ill patients and their loved ones. Teddy, the only nurse in the area, asks Carol's children to lower their voices, telling them that if they do not keep their noise down, they will be forced to leave the hospital until the next day. Despite his warning they continue to argue, disturbing several patients and families nearby. Teddy must now decide whether he should kick them out of the hospital as he suggested that he would. On the one hand, their arguing is clearly disruptive to the other patients and their families as well as to the hospital staff. Yet, on the other hand, the choice that Carol's children are faced with is understandably extremely difficult and emotional. To make matters worse, given Carol's condition, if Teddy kicks them out, there is a chance that this may be the last opportunity that they have to see their mother.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What should Teddy do in this situation? What moral considerations are relevant to his decision?
2. Are Carol's children doing anything wrong in having this argument in public? Under what conditions, if any, is it unethical for two people to have a loud argument in a public space?
3. Suppose that there are no nurses or other hospital staff around to address the situation. Would it be appropriate for others in the immediate area to get involved? If so, how? If not, why not?