Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

Lata, a mother of two children, was admitted to a hospital for acute abdominal pain. Her sister-in-law, Sujatha, accompanied her. Dr. Mansi examined Lata and recommended a diagnostic laparoscopy. Lata's consent was taken to conduct the medical procedure under general anesthesia.

During the laparoscopy, Dr. Mansi's team discovered a tumor in Lata's uterus. A closer examination suggested that the tumor could be malignant. One option before Dr. Mansi was to extract a sample for biopsy. In that case, if the tumor was malignant, Lata would have to undergo another surgery for removal of the uterus. An alternative was to remove the uterus immediately. Dr. Mansi had to take a quick decision.

As Lata was under general anesthesia, Dr. Mansi explained the situation to Sujatha. Sujatha agreed with Dr. Mansi's recommendations for a hysterectomy, wherein Lata's uterus would be removed to avoid the risk and pain of undergoing another surgery. Dr. Mansi removed Lata's uterus after receiving Sujatha's consent in writing. Lata was informed of this the next day. She was very upset and felt betrayed as she had not consented to the removal of her uterus. Lata complained to the police who tried to convince her that Dr. Mansi had acted with good intention to help a patient. Sujatha was of the same opinion, however Lata was

not convinced and decided to approach the court.

(a) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.

(b) Discuss the moral conduct of the doctor in this situation.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Patient autonomy, informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, substituted consent, medical paternalism, reproductive autonomy, proportionality, professional integrity, emergency exception

Model Answer

1. Ethical Issues

The central issue is conflict between beneficence and patient autonomy. Lata had consented to diagnostic laparoscopy, not hysterectomy. Removal of the uterus permanently affects reproductive autonomy and therefore ordinarily requires specific informed consent. Sujatha's consent cannot automatically substitute for that of a competent adult patient.

2. Doctor's Moral Conduct

Dr. Mansi appears to have acted with beneficence, intending to prevent another surgery, pain and possible progression of malignancy. However, good intention alone does not establish ethical conduct. The doctor also had a duty of non-maleficence, respect for autonomy and informed consent.

3. Ethical Dilemma

If the tumour presented an immediate and serious threat to Lata's life and postponement would have caused significant harm, emergency intervention could potentially be ethically justified. However, if biopsy and subsequent

surgery were medically feasible, immediate hysterectomy without Lata's prior authorisation becomes ethically problematic.

4. Appropriate Conduct

The doctor should have considered whether delay was genuinely dangerous, documented the clinical rationale and followed applicable medical protocols. In non-emergency circumstances, the procedure should have been deferred until Lata could provide informed consent.

Conclusion

The doctor's intention may have been compassionate, but ethical medicine requires both beneficence and respect for autonomy. The morality of the action therefore depends significantly on the immediacy of medical necessity and the availability of reasonable alternatives.

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