Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

Citing the serious adverse effects of long-term medication, a doctor convinces the family of a female patient for surgery. This led the patient to reluctantly consent for the surgery, though her original choice was to opt for medication. Explain the concepts of paternalism and beneficence by analysing the doctor's action.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Paternalism, beneficence, autonomy, informed consent, medical ethics, patient dignity, non-maleficence

Model Answer

Introduction

The case involves tension between the doctor's professional judgment and the patient's autonomy in making an informed medical decision.

1. Paternalism

Paternalism occurs when a professional restricts or influences an individual's autonomous choice for that person's perceived welfare. The doctor's persuasion of the family, rather than directly engaging the patient, reflects paternalistic conduct.

2. Beneficence

Beneficence requires acting for the patient's welfare. The doctor may have genuinely believed that surgery would prevent the serious adverse effects associated with prolonged medication.

3. Ethical Concern

Beneficence does not automatically override autonomy. A competent patient has the right to understand alternatives, risks and benefits and make a voluntary decision. Reluctant consent may therefore raise concerns about genuine informed consent.

4. Ethical Approach

The doctor should explain all options directly to the patient in comprehensible language and respect her informed preference unless legally recognised exceptions apply.

Conclusion

Ethical medicine requires balancing beneficence with autonomy, not achieving welfare by undermining patient choice.

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