Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

A landslide occurred in the middle of the night on 20th July, 2023 in a remote mountain hamlet, approximately 60 kilometres from Uttarkashi. The landslide was caused by torrential rains and has resulted in large-scale destruction of property and life. You, as District Magistrate of that area, have rushed to the spot with a team of doctors, NGOs, media and police along with numerous support staff to oversee the rescue operations.

A man came running to you with a request for urgent medical help for his pregnant wife who is in labour and is losing blood. You directed your medical team to examine his wife. They return and convey to you that this woman needs blood transfusion immediately. Upon enquiry, you come to know that a few blood collection bags and blood group test kits are available in the ambulance accompanying your team. Few people of your team have already volunteered to donate blood.

Being a physician who has graduated from AIIMS, you know that blood for transfusion needs to be procured only through a recognized blood bank. Your team members are divided on this issue; some favour transfusion, while some others oppose it. The doctors in the team are ready to facilitate the delivery provided they are not penalized for transfusion. Now you are in a dilemma. Your professional training emphasizes on prioritising service to humanity and

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saving lives of individuals.

(a) What are the ethical issues involved in this case?

(b) Evaluate the options available to you, being

District Magistrate of the area.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2023	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

The case involves a conflict between legal/professional norms and the ethical imperative to save an immediately endangered life. The decision must balance beneficence, non-maleficence, professional responsibility, rule of law, informed consent, emergency necessity and accountability, while ensuring that extraordinary action is taken only when lawful alternatives are genuinely unavailable.

Model Answer

Introduction:

The situation presents a classic conflict between **professional regulations and the moral duty to save life**. As District Magistrate and a trained physician, I must protect both human life and institutional integrity while responding proportionately to the emergency.

(a) Ethical issues involved:

1. **Saving life versus adherence to rules:** Immediate transfusion may save the woman's life, while normal procedures require blood from a recognised blood bank.
2. **Beneficence and non-maleficence:** The medical team has a duty to provide beneficial treatment and prevent avoidable death, while ensuring that transfusion itself does not create additional harm.
3. **Professional responsibility:** Doctors must respect medical standards, while the extraordinary disaster situation may demand emergency judgment.
4. **Rule of law versus exceptional circumstances:** Bypassing established procedures can undermine accountability, but rigid adherence to procedure in a life-threatening emergency may itself produce grave harm.

5. **Consent and accountability:** The patient's informed consent, wherever possible, and proper documentation of the decision remain important.

(b) Options available as District Magistrate:

Option 1: Strictly refuse transfusion:
This protects procedural compliance but risks preventable maternal and foetal death. It would be ethically difficult to justify if no timely alternative exists.

Option 2: Immediately transfuse without safeguards:
This prioritises life but creates medical, legal and professional risks, including incompatible transfusion and accountability concerns.

Option 3: Emergency transfusion with maximum safeguards:
I would first urgently explore every lawful alternative—contact the nearest recognised blood bank, arrange emergency transport, seek support from nearby hospitals and activate disaster-response medical resources.

If no timely lawful source is available and the woman's life is imminently threatened, I would authorise the medical team to take **medically necessary emergency measures**, after appropriate blood-group testing, informed consent where feasible, and documentation of the circumstances. I would simultaneously inform the competent health authority and record the exceptional circumstances for subsequent review.

Conclusion:
The ethical principle of **saving an immediately endangered life should guide action, but not through careless disregard of medical safeguards**. As DM, my approach would therefore be compassionate, proportionate, medically prudent and fully accountable.

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