

## **When Vaccination Status Leads to Conflict Physicians Question Their Response to Anti-Vax Parents**



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Bioethics case study on parents reacting defensively when asked about their child's vaccination status.

Emilie Amelian is a 6-year-old female who presented to the emergency department with her parents, James and Ester Amelian, after a brief episode of dizziness and loss of consciousness while playing with friends. Emilie quickly recovered and told her parents that she felt fine, but they chose to take her home to rest as a precaution.

Although Emilie appeared fully recovered later that day, Ms. Amelian remained concerned and wanted her evaluated at the hospital. Mr. Amelian felt this was unnecessary but agreed there was no harm in seeking medical evaluation.

### **Child Admitted with Vague Symptoms**

At the hospital, the emergency physician, Dr. Tasnoe, examined Emilie and believed she was likely mildly dehydrated or had not eaten enough that morning. She recommended discharge with instructions to eat, hydrate, and rest. Dissatisfied with this assessment, Emilie's parents became increasingly insistent that she be admitted and undergo further testing. Exhausted after working a double shift, Dr. Tasnoe agreed to admit Emilie for observation.

Emilie was subsequently evaluated by Dr. Wallace, who reviewed her medical record and discussed the events with her parents. They reported no clear explanation but mentioned concern about possible environmental factors, including fungus in their yard.

While reviewing Emilie's chart, Dr. Wallace noted that she was behind on her vaccinations and asked whether they planned to update them.

### **Parents Deny Vaccine Relevance**

The Amelians reacted defensively, stating that vaccinations were unrelated to the episode and asserting that Emilie had strong natural immunity. They expressed distrust of modern medicine and refused further discussion about vaccinations, insisting instead on additional diagnostic testing, which Dr. Wallace ordered.

All test results returned negative, and Emilie was deemed medically stable for discharge. Her parents expressed anger, stating that the hospital was giving up on her and that they intended to take her to a specialist. They requested a referral to assist with scheduling and insurance, which Dr. Wallace provided despite some ethical discomfort. Emilie was discharged, with an appointment scheduled with an out-of-state specialist.

### **Physicians Request Consultation**

Following Emilie's hospitalization, the medical team requested an ethics committee consultation, involving both Dr. Wallace and Dr. Tasnoe, seeking guidance on how similar situations might be managed in the future to reduce conflict and improve communication.