The Paparazzi Patient: Maintaining Ethical Social Work Practice with VIP Patients

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Key Concepts

- Labeling & typology of a VIP
- VIP-related syndromes
- Ethical tensions: VIP in the healthcare milieu
- Accommodating the VIP patient
- Our response: As an individual & as a profession
Who is a VIP?

“Anyone whose presence in the hospital, by virtue of fame, position, or claim on the public interest, may substantially disrupt the normal course of patient care.”

Smith et al., 1988, p. 1421.

The VIP

The Designated VIP
The Self-appointed VIP

- "want-to-be"
- "pseudo-VIP"
- Potentate
- difficult patient
- trappings of wealth
- narcissist

Groves et al., 2002

Special interest VIP

- clinical characteristics
- personal characteristics
- Medical VIP
- VIP
- of interest to MD or others
- interesting medical condition

Schenkenberg et al., 2007

The VIP in the healthcare milieu

- What's the problem?

- Different clinical care
- Impact on other patients
- Media interest
- Patient privacy
- Security
- Staff reaction

"Staff who espouse their stance of "equal care for everyone" may resent participating in the "special" care of a VIP."

Schenkenberg, et al, 2007, p. 60
Ethical Tension

Utilitarian

Deontological

NASW Standards

- Importance of human relationships
- Cultural competency and social diversity
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Respect

Person in environment:
The ultra-franchised patient
Where can I park my private plane?

VIP Syndrome
- Status of person affects medical care decisions. Block, 1993
- Deviation from standard care can result in worse care.
- Dosing care: Over or undertreatment as countertransferential risks. Martin et al., 2004
- Examples: The care of Michael Jackson, Joan Rivers

Chief Syndrome
- S.O.P.
- VIP patient
- non-VIP patient
- optimal care
- usual staff location & procedures
- chief

Guzman et al., 2011

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VIP Phenomenons

Celebrity Phenomenon
- Staff reaction to media exposure
- Caregiver dysfunction in reaction to the spotlight
  Groves et al., 2002

Star-struck Phenomenon
- Provider who has acquired secondary celebrity status & who has breached confidentiality.
- Related to provider’s need for increased status.
  Schenkenberg et al., 2007

Accommodating the VIP

- Special VIP programs and amenities in our facilities
- Can result in prestige for hospital and treatment team
- Philanthropic gifts for outstanding care benefit all patients.
  “The patient does not leave his position, rank and accomplishment outside the door, and these obviously must be recognized and respected.”
  Strange, 1985, p. 475

Managing the Medical Milieu

- Prepare ahead with VIP protocols
- Same providers, same *location, same care
- Teamwork: Don’t work in silos
- Security & confidentiality
- Communicate, communicate, communicate

* with consideration for privacy, i.e. waiting room
Social work response to VIP patients

- Continue to practice person-centered care.
- View the VIP patient as a clinical subpopulation. Martin et al., 2004
- “The needs and suffering of the VIP are no different from those of the rest...” Martin et al., 2004, p. 369

In closing...

- “The VIP is, above all, a person in need of help.” Smith, Shesser, 1996, p. 1421

Resources for Further Reading