

Exploring The Limits Of Autonomy

Andrew G. Shuman, MD*† and Andrew R. Barnosky, DO, MPH*†‡

*University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, †Adult Ethics Committee and ‡Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Michigan Medical Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan *Reprint Address:* Andrew Barnosky, DO, MPH, Taubman Health Care Center, 1000 East Medical Center Drive — Room B1354, Ann Arbor, MI 481090303

Abstract—Background: The ethical principle of autonomy is explored as it applies to situations in which patients' capacities to make decisions are questionable. **Case Report:** A 40-year-old man presented to the Emergency Department with an epidural hematoma, and refused to undergo emergent surgical treatment. Considering the acutely life threatening nature of his problem and the inability to confirm the patient's capacity in the presence of a traumatic brain injury, the decision was made to proceed with emergent surgical treatment without consent. **Discussion:** The concept of conditional autonomy is introduced, defined, and employed to defend the process whereby a select group of patients may be treated without full knowledge of their wishes.

2011 Elsevier Inc.

Keywords—autonomy; physician-patient relationship; epidural hematoma

PDF created with pdf Factory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com