

## Case Study: Non-Denominational Christian Refusal of Care for Children

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A four-year-old girl is brought into the emergency room with a comminuted fracture of the tibia. This injury was confirmed by x-ray, and she is in a lot of pain. It happened when she jumped off the school swing set and she was brought to the ER by the school nurse who stayed with her until her mother arrived. The recommended course of action is surgery to realign and set the bones to allow for proper healing. The mother is visibly distressed by this treatment option and asks that the doctor simply give her daughter a cast and discharge them. After the doctor pushes the mother to consider the surgery, the mother shares that her Christian tradition does not believe in surgical intervention. She is already upset that the school nurse consented to x-rays in her absence. She says that she believes God will heal her daughter and asks the doctor to pray with her. She continues to refuse to consent to the surgery.

### Reflection:

- What steps would you take to understand the beliefs of the patient's parents, move forward with patient care, and address legal and ethical issues?
- How does the religion of the patient and her mother play into the decision you make regarding care?
- How does religious belief change the way you would approach patient education in contrast with a generic reservation about surgery?
- What resources could you provide to the family?
- If you can legally override the mother, should you?

### Additional Resources:

"Fractures & Trauma." Mayo Clinic Health System,  
<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/locations/owatonna/services-and-treatments/orthopedic-surgery/fractures-and-trauma>.

Goldstein, Sydney. "Archives." LawInfo, 29 Jan. 2021,  
<https://www.lawinfo.com/resources/insurance/health-insurance/when-can-a-parent-deny-medical-treatment-to-a.html>.

"Non-Denominational Churches Explained." Grace Plano, 7 July 2020,  
<https://graceplano.church/about/non-denominational-churches-explained/>.



Orr, Robert. "Faith-Based Decisions: Parents Who Refuse Appropriate Care for Their Children, Commentary 1." Journal of Ethics | American Medical Association, American Medical Association, 1 Aug. 2003, <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/faith-based-decisions-parents-who-refuse-appropriate-care-their-children-commentary-1/2003-08>.