

## Case Study: Tension between Western and Eastern Medical Treatment

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A Chinese family is on vacation in the United States. During their trip, one of the family members gets very ill and decides to visit a doctor. The family schedules an emergency visit to a physician and the patient undergoes several tests. The doctor responsible for the case examines the results and believes that all signs point to an early stage of a terminal cancer. The doctor pulls the family aside and informs them of the tragic news prior to telling the patient directly. After debriefing with the doctor, the family kindly asks him to not reveal the diagnosis to the patient. They explain that in China it is common practice for doctors to not disclose a terminal diagnosis in hopes of the patient living out the rest of their life stress-free. They point out that they were supposed to leave for China yesterday, but their trip home was pushed back to tomorrow because of the doctor's visit. The family asks that the doctor respect their culture and its medical ethics as they don't have any more business to attend to in the United States and are leaving as soon as possible.

### Reflection:

- If you were the doctor, what would you do in this situation?
- Should American doctors try to abide by foreign medicinal practices when working with foreign patients, or should they stick with the standard procedures of the American medical system?
- Who are you accountable to in this situation?
- What should a doctor do if a patient's belief, practices, or traditions require action or inaction that impedes a patient's recovery?
- Who could you ask for help in responding to this situation?

### Additional Resources:

Wang, Hongchun, et al. "To Tell or Not: The Chinese Doctors' Dilemma on Disclosure of a Cancer Diagnosis to the Patient." *Iranian Journal of Public Health*, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Nov. 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6294856/>.