



## University of Birmingham

This resource provides an example of the type of information students may require whilst engaging in the illustrative learning design provided.

### Where Can I Go for More Information?

#### Jehovah's Witnesses and Medical Ethics - BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/witnesses/>

#### Extract From The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust Policy for the Treatment of Adult Jehovah's Witnesses

<http://www.nhsdudley.nhs.uk/sections/publications/documents/FOI4535605228.pdf>

#### Extract from East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust Guidelines on the Clinical Management of Jehovah's Witnesses

<http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/home-page/for-staff/a-z-departments/clinical-quality-patient-safety/clinical-and-non-clinical-policies/?assetdet=24134>

### Jehovah's Witness and Medical Ethics

#### Extracts From the BBC website

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions, including autologous transfusions in which a person has their own blood stored to be used later in a medical procedure, (though some Witnesses will accept autologous procedures such as dialysis or cell salvage in which their blood is not stored) and the use of packed RBCs (red blood cells), WBCs (white blood cells), plasma or platelets.

Witnesses believe that God has forbidden this in Bible passages such as:

*Only flesh with its soul-its blood- you must not eat – Genesis 9:3-4*  
*Abstain from...fornication and from what is strangled and from blood – Acts 15:19-21*

Accepting a blood transfusion willingly and without regret is seen as a sin. The Witness concerned would no longer be regarded as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

This refusal to accept blood makes some operations more dangerous and causes some doctors considerable anxiety. Witnesses are willing to absolve doctors of responsibility by signing forms with appropriate wording.

### Respecting belief

Doctors generally feel that respect for the patient's autonomy requires that their wishes should be obeyed. They have sound legal reasons for this too, as to administer blood in the face of refusal by a patient may be unlawful and could lead to criminal and/or civil proceedings. Other issues to consider are:

- Many Jehovah's Witnesses carry a signed and witnessed advance directive card absolutely refusing blood and releasing doctors from any liability arising from this refusal.
- Cell-free blood products, containing haemoglobin but not red blood cells have recently become available and may be acceptable for some Jehovah's Witnesses. Although Jehovah's Witnesses cannot accept blood, they are open to other medical procedures.
- If a Witness is transfused against their will, this is not regarded as a sin on the part of the individual. Children who are transfused against their parents' wishes are not rejected or stigmatised in any way.

## Give Me Examples

### Extract From The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust Policy for the Treatment of Adult Jehovah's Witnesses

<http://www.nhsdudley.nhs.uk/sections/publications/documents/FOI4535605228.pdf>

#### 4.2 Unconscious patients with life threatening bleeding

(a) Any advance directive stating the patient will not accept blood transfusion even in the event of life-threatening bleeding should be requested from relatives or associates of the patient and examined, if time permits.

(b) A copy should be placed in the case notes and its contents respected.

(c) The doctor (who should be of consultant status), if time permits, should discuss with the patient's relatives the implications of withholding blood.

(d) The doctor should act in the best interests of the patient and will be expected to perform to the best of his/her ability, which may involve giving blood in an imminently life-threatening situation, where all reasonable efforts to locate an applicable and valid advance directive document have failed.

(e) If there is no documentary evidence of refusal to accept blood transfusion but the doctor has learnt that the patient is a JW, then blood transfusion will **be postponed** for as long as possible. However, blood transfusion will then be given if clearly in the patient's best interests.

(f) The above should be clearly documented in the case notes.

### Learning design example...

This design is based on students normally attending weekly 3-hour teaching blocks. This example offers a flexible blend of in and out of class enquiry-based learning activities they can undertake.

