Health Care Workers Should Not Be Tested for Hepatitis C

Bashyr Aziz

In the following viewpoint Bashyr Aziz argues against United Kingdom (UK) Department of Health (DH) guidelines requiring the testing of new nursing and medical students for hepatitis C and HIV. Aziz contends that the risks of transmission of blood borne diseases from health care workers to patients is very low. In fact, he suggests that more health care workers acquire blood borne pathogens from patients rather than the other way around. Aziz thinks the UK testing guidelines go against many UK laws, which are meant to protect people from discrimination and from invasions of privacy. He believes it is unethical and unfair to require health care workers to be tested for HIV or hepatitis C before they begin their careers. Aziz is a registered nurse and a senior lecturer in primary care at the University of Wolverhampton in the UK.

For many years, there has been an understanding between healthcare workers and their patients in which no one would expect to know the HIV or hepatitis C status of anyone else.

**Unwritten Compact**

This unwritten compact served both parties well because to demand information about the blood borne virus (BBV) status of the members of either group would be to deny their basic right to privacy.

After all, why should nurses and doctors wish to know about their patients’ BBV status except where such knowledge affects their treatment? And why should patients wish to know about their nurses’ and doctors’ infectivity, except where this allows them to choose their carers?

In general, the compact has worked well. There is not a single documented case of HIV transmission from healthcare worker to patient in the UK [United Kingdom], although there have been five documented cases of occupationally acquired HIV in healthcare workers [according to the UK Health Protection Agency].

A nurse attends a patient in a London hospital. The author argues that because there have been only fifteen documented cases of hepatitis C transmission from health care workers to patients in the United Kingdom, mandatory testing is not needed. (Fiona Hanson/PA Photos/Landov)