13.5 Medical ethics: autonomy, consent and confidentiality

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 24 marks**

KEY WORDS autonomy • capacity • confidentiality

Objective

Apply the principles; test capacity; bound confidentiality.

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ **Four + three**

Autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice – autonomy leads for competent adults ✓. Consent = capacity (understand, retain, weigh, communicate – decision-specific) + information + voluntariness.

■ **Worked example: the jurisdiction**

England and Wales: breach only for serious risk to others (notifiable disease) or law; minimum necessary; GMC-framed ✓.

2 Practice

2.1 Name the four principles. [3]

2.2 The four capacity elements? [3]

2.3 One clause: when may confidentiality be breached? [3]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A fictional patient refuses a transfusion the team believes life-saving.

Assess capacity against the four elements with a question for each (state the decision; the reason; the consequence; weigh it back) ✓. Assuming capacity throughout: resolve the conflict by the principles (autonomy leads; beneficence shapes what is offered) and state what the team documents ✓. Explain how the answer changes if the patient cannot retain the information for even minutes ✓. [8]

3.2 A fictional clinic is asked by police for a patient's diagnosis; the patient objects.

Decide under a declared jurisdiction (England and Wales): is this serious risk to others or a legal requirement? – if neither power nor court order is produced, decline ✓. State the minimum-necessary rule if disclosure is later compelled (only what the order requires) and the role of GMC guidance as the frame ✓. Note in one line why the course names the jurisdiction at all ✓. [7]

Solutions

2.1

- Autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice ✓.

2.2

- Understand, retain, weigh, communicate – per decision ✓.

2.3

- Only serious risk to others (e.g. notifiable disease) or a legal requirement – minimum necessary ✓.

3.1

- Understand: "can you tell me the decision you are making?" ✓.
- Reason and consequence: "your reasons?; the risk you accept?" ✓.
- Weigh: consistent restatement ✓.
- Capacity throughout → autonomy leads; beneficence shapes offers; document the assessment ✓.
- Cannot retain → capacity fails for this decision; framework shifts (best practice within law) ✓.

3.2

- Neither produced → decline; confidentiality holds ✓.
- If compelled by order: disclose only what it requires (minimum necessary) ✓.
- GMC guidance frames the judgment ✓.
- Jurisdiction named because the answers differ by law – no single global rule ✓.

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