

SURGICAL ETHICS CHALLENGES

Transgression confession: Ethics of medical error disclosure

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Complications of medicine are like the sand traps in golf courses. They are regrettable, cannot be completely avoided even by the best, and the real skill lies in solving the problems they present. Dr Al Mighty told a resident to ignore a barely elevated temperature in a postoperative patient. “It is nothing worthy of your concern,” the Al Mighty said. But, the surgical resident remembered a break in operative sterile technique had occurred, about which she remained concerned. When an area felt mildly edematous, the wound was probed, and pus exuded. The patient asked how this had happened. The resident should respond:

- A. Keep her mouth shut.
- B. Tell the patient that wound infections just happen.
- C. Tell the patient that a break in sterile technique was responsible.
- D. Refer the matter to the chief resident for advice.
- E. Tell the patient to ask the attending surgeon.