

Module 9: Justice – Exclusive Inclusivity?

Mark is a 35-year old patient with a rare and aggressive type of cancer requiring bi-weekly chemotherapy treatments in a small community hospital. Prior to Mark receiving chemotherapy treatment, he disclosed to his care team that he has a severe allergy to animals, and that despite strict compliance with his allergy medications is vulnerable to life-threatening asthma attacks if he comes into close contact with a dog (or pet dander). This has been noted in his patient chart.

One day, when Mark arrives at the Chemotherapy Suite for his regularly scheduled bi-weekly appointment, he notices another patient in the Chemotherapy Suite with a dog in his lap. Mark immediately alerts the Charge Nurse, Elaine, and tells her that he can't receive treatment in that room because of his life-threatening allergy to dogs and pet dander. Elaine tells Mark to wait outside of the Cancer Centre (both now and in future visits) whenever he sees a dog, and to rest assured that he'll be called to come inside for his appointment when there are no dogs present, and it's his turn to receive treatment.

Upon Mark returning home after his appointment, he called the Cancer Centre to complain about how he was treated, but was told by the Cancer Centre Director, Heather, that service animals are allowed to accompany patients under the Human Rights Code, and that there are a number of cancer patients who regularly receive treatment at the Chemotherapy Suite who require the assistance of their service animals.

In light of Mark's complaint, the care team (including the physician, Heather, and Elaine) has decided to convene a meeting to discuss how best to proceed, and the Ethics Office was called to join the meeting.