

What was morally wrong about writing the code for the pharmaceutical quiz? Should Sourour have done anything differently? What and why? (or why not?)

In the article by Bill Sourour, Bill discloses a past experience where he was asked to code something that was outright unethical, although he did not realize it until it was too late. Since he had been coding all of his life, Sourour did not think too much of a firm asking him to code and design a website for them. One project was to develop a quiz that targets teenage girls asking them a series of questions to recommend a type of drug based on their answers. One thing that threw Sourour's Project Manager off is that no matter how the questions are answered, it led to the client's drug. This was found out later to be a marketing tactic to bypass Canadian laws preventing advertising prescription drugs directly to consumers. Later, Sourour found out that a young girl on the medication had committed suicide – it was then that Bill found out that severe depression and suicidal thoughts were side effects of the drug. Although he did not know, there were repercussions that not only the company, but Bill had to live with as well. In this case analysis I will argue that Consequentialism/Utilitarianism shows that the code was morally problematic not on Sourour's part due to his lack of knowledge of the drug, but because of the company not disclosing that information. Besides declining, Sourour had no reason to do anything differently since he had no idea about the side effects.

The ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct was written and developed by the Association for Computing Machinery's Committee on Professional Ethics and later adopted by the ACM Council in 1992. There are 4 main guidelines with subordinating information in the ACM Code of Ethics that provides a means of what to strive for in the professional workplace. Under general moral imperatives, there are more guidelines regarding how to act as an ACM member. It starts out saying 'I will' ... contribute to society and human well-being, avoid harm to others, be honest, not discriminate, and other prefaces. These guidelines are in place in hopes that the ACM member will take special care not to misrepresent ACM or related positions. The second allows for more specific professional responsibilities, such as striving for the highest quality of professional work, acquiring and maintaining professional competence, accepting professional review, among other requirements. Now there are 2 more sections in the ACM Code of Ethics alone but I would like to slightly go over the other Code of Ethics. Along with the ACM, there is the IEEE Code of ethics that is just one section but says a lot. The IEEE Code of Ethics aims to hold the safety, health and welfare of the public in the highest regard, to reject bribery, improve public understanding, and other guidelines as well. Lastly, there is the NSPE Code of Ethics, from the National Society of Professional Engineers. Here, the Rules of practice are just like the IEEE code of ethics in that first is public safety and welfare, along with avoiding deceptive acts (bribery), and not discrediting other engineers.

These concepts as a whole discuss the need and the essentiality of acting in an ethical manner while in a professional field. While the rules may be in a different order or may look different to

the user, everyone can use these Codes of Ethics while in the workplace, no matter what that may be. In Sourour's case, he may have thought that he applied these codes while working on the project that he was assigned to, but the lack of communication from the pharmaceutical company denied him the chance to be accountable for those standards in that regard. There was no feasible danger to anyone in his mind as he was coding. Considering the dinner, however, there was immorality in that. At this point, Sourour knew about the side effects and somebody had died already. Consequentialism focuses on the consequences of the actions people take. For a consequentialist, an action is right if the consequences of that action were good, and wrong if the consequences of that action were bad. In my opinion, his initial act of coding was not bad. There is no problem in him doing his job, although the people who sent him their grievances might think so. Now according to Consequentialism, if he did not code the website, nobody would have died, so that makes his act of coding the website wrong. Him not telling the client is also bad, because more girls might have been affected in the time it would have taken to out the client. Again, I don't think he did anything wrong in coding, the problem lies in after he found out about the drug.

In the other given reading, Mary Beth Armstrong discusses confidentiality as a comparison across the professions of medicine, engineering, and accounting. Justification for confidentiality rests on these four premises: individual autonomy over personal information, respect for relationships among human beings and for intimacy, the obligation created by a pledge of silence, and utility to persons and society. Although rigid, these cannot be accepted as principle. These steps are just guidelines in behaving ethically in a professional manner. Since professional confidentiality is seen as *prima facie*, these become morally binding, just like the Codes of Ethics mentioned earlier. There are 4 requirements for the justification of infringements on these rules of professional confidentiality: the moral objective justifying infringement must have a realistic prospect of achievement, it was necessary in the sense that there was no other morally preferable alternative actions, the act constituted the least infringement possible, or when the agent seeks to minimize the effects of infringement. Armstrong later goes on to portray how these ethics are implemented in the medical, engineering and accounting field. In the example of the Tarasoff case, Dr. Moore had a duty to warn Tarasoff of Poddar's odd behavior, about his purchases, and that he was not mentally okay. Letting someone go and forgetting about the client during their therapy is what causes therapies to fail. When the physician gives up, everyone else seems to do the same. No matter what, public safety should be encouraged with active support especially just if the client disclosed this information during a session.

It seems as though Bill Sourour's initial act of coding still cannot be charged under these standards. Regarding the first requirement for justification, he did have a realistic prospect of achievement, which he accomplished. There was other morally preferable actions, but in his case, only in hindsight. Again, not knowing what the drug is or the side effects of said drug might cause that lapse in judgement due to ignorance of details. I do believe the act constituted the least infringement out of all of them, and the last one cannot be used since he never meant to use it in the first place. There are guidelines for when to go public about information regarding safety, which will be discussed about after he discovered the news about the drug.

The criteria is that: the harm done by the product is serious, they make concerns known to their superiors, or make it known through higher-ups. There is also if you documented evidence proving that the evidence is there, and that lastly, if you have strong general evidence. After figuring out that the drug may cause severe depression and suicidal thoughts, the first thing should have been to tell the client. There is the possibility that the client knows and is trying to push the product for some malicious reason. Sourour decided to leave it alone during that time and again through utilitarianism we can see that he should have gone to say something when he found out.

Bill Sourour did not know, but through the theory of Consequentialism and utilitarianism, he was indirectly responsible for the death of some teenage girls. Of course the way we would look at it in real life would disprove that and rather say he was indirectly involved in it since he did not know and was not informed of the risks behind the drug. Regardless, we see his true nature in how his sister was on the drug and he immediately contacted her to get off of the drug. If it was up to Sourour and he knew what he knows now, he would not have let that website reach the internet. There are guidelines for multiple careers that fit together regarding ethical behavior in a professional setting. These guidelines were followed by Sourours as best he could with the information he had, and I don't believe he could have done anything else besides probably ask what the drug is. Again, there wasn't anything morally wrong about writing the code, it was just used for the wrong reasons.