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### Case Analysis on Professional Ethics

There are many jobs and professions that come with a level of expected ethical and moral responsibility when doing them. Typical professions that must abide by a set code of ethics are healthcare workers, lawyers, and engineers. These professions have a level of reasonability when it comes to the way they conduct themselves. This is due to these professions dealing with confidential information or can have a great impact on a large number of people. Bill Sourour found himself in a profession that dealt with medical information and required engineering expertise. Sourour was tasked with creating a website that offered general information about medicines. Within this website, he created an online quiz that would tell those who took it what type of medicine they should take based on the answers. The issue with the quiz is that it would always recommend the quiz taker a certain medicine no matter what was answered. This resulted in the quiz being a marketing tactic for that medicine rather than what it was being made out to be. While this was what Sourour was tasked to do over time, he began to question if it was ethically correct. Realizing the implications of creating a website that is essentially fooling those who use it. While it is up for debate if Sourour was ethically wrong for continuing with the creation of the quiz. Sourour felt that it was a breach of the code of ethics he should abide by. In this Case Analysis I will argue that Contractarianism shows us that the code was morally problematic because it went against the code of ethics and that Sourour should have done things differently because he is responsible for the code he designs and the impacts that come with it.

The issue when it comes to creating a code of ethics is it can be perceived differently by each person. Additionally, it would be hard to create a code of ethics covering every interaction in a professional setting. A code of ethics seeks to provide a common set of rules to follow when it comes to a professional setting. It essentially sets the standard for how a professional should operate when in a certain field of work. This is done in order to make sure professionals are acting in a similar way as one another. With the goal of protecting people when interacting with such professionals. Creating a code of ethics hopes to lessen the ethical issues that can arise when working with these professionals.

While there is a wide range of codes of ethics and it can vary depending on the field or company. The ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is a code of ethics that focuses on computing professions. It sets a standard of how a professional in this field should interact with society and the moral responsibilities they should withhold. While the ACM code of ethics touches on various aspects of ethical situations there are some major concepts that should be highlighted. One concept that is important to point out is the moral imperative that one must “contribute to society and human well-being”. This is an important part to highlight because, in the case of Sourour, he didn’t follow this. When Sourour created the quiz, he knew that it was wrong due to it essentially misleading the user. Neglecting the well-being of the quiz taker and the issues the quiz taker could have if they were to purchase the medicine that it suggested. This wouldn’t be as much of an ethical issue if the quiz was created in an ethical manner where it was suggesting medicine based on the answers you gave. Due to the quiz disregarding the answers given and only providing one medicine, this is where it became unethical. Sourour noticed that it was a problem and unethical to employ this type of marketing but turned his cheek because he was tasked to do it. In this situation, Sourour should have realized that he is supposed to

minimize the negative effects of computing systems. Going through with the creation of the quiz was a misstep in his ethical judgment. Additionally, another concept from the ACM is that computing professionals are supposed to “avoid harm to others”. While this can be a complex concept and harm can be defined differently in many situations. Harm in this case would be any negative consequences that come out of creating the quiz. As it was stated, the medicine that the quiz was advertising had side effects that could lead to users self-harming or other negative side effects. While this can be seen as not the computing professionals' fault due to it being the medicine that is harming them. This would be overlooking the fact that the quiz was advertising only that one medicine. Neglecting the user's answers given and neglecting the wellbeing of the user.

Looking at the case from a Contractarianism viewpoint it is evident that there was wrongdoing. In this case, Sourour broke the code of ethics which is a social contract that consumers have with professionals. Due to this the quiz takers were taken advantage of and were placed in harm's way. Without the expected social contract being adhered to consumers or users would not interact with the quiz. Users expected the quiz to give them honest feedback on what medicine to take. This is due to the social contract or code of ethics that medical fields as well as engineers are supposed to adhere to. In this situation, Sourour should have adhered to the social contract that is established when a computing professional. If he had done so the quiz would hopefully not have been created in the way, it was. He knew that it was ethically questionable due to it deceiving the users. Placing Sourour at partial fault due to his negligence. Additionally, Sourour should have placed himself in the perspective of the user to see if he would be okay with the quiz. Essentially, taking a veil of ignorance perspective to see if he would be okay with being

on the other side of the situation. This would have made him realize he wouldn't want to be. This can be seen when he finds out about the side effects of the medicine.

Mary Beth Armstrong, "Confidentiality: A Comparison Across the Professions of Medicine, Engineering, and Accounting." discusses how confidentiality works in a profession. Focusing on the responsibilities professionals have when they are working in a field. Within this text, prima facie is mentioned a lot. Prima facie can be seen as a requirement to uphold an expected duty unless there is a better reason not to. Prima facies can be broken when they conflict with other prima facie duties. In this text confidentiality is a prima facie duty to users and employers. The text brings forth times when internal prima facie duties of confidentiality should be broken in order to meet an external prima facie duty. "In summary, confidentiality is a prima face obligation, but not an absolute obligation. Ethicists may argue about when and under what circumstances confidentiality should yield to other duties, especially duties to protect the public from harm, but few ethicists, if any, would see professional confidentiality as an absolute duty." (Armstrong p.77). This concept is important because, in the case of Sourour, it could have been applied.

Sourour even after creating the quiz never came out to disclose that the quiz was giving back false information. Never telling the masses that the quiz was an advertisement. Additionally, this could be seen as a time when confidentiality should yield to other duties. That duty is the health and safety of the public. Another concept that is brought forth is the concept that engineers have a moral duty to protect the welfare of the public. "Engineers, in their contribution to technological endeavors, must continually balance creativity and the end effects of their work upon the public welfare. Their contribution may be affected by management and financial decision which are in conflict with their own ethical standards." (Armstrong p. 81).

This is important because it places a key importance on engineers and their contribution to things being created. Placing significance on the role they have in managing what gets created. This can reflect back to Sourour because when he realized the creation of the quiz was unethical, he shouldn't have gone through with it. At the time he realized it was unethical he should have challenged it because of the impacts it could have on public welfare. The interesting thought that Armstrong's writings bring is that would it be ethical for Sourour to break confidently with his employer out of his prima facie to the public. From Armstrong's viewpoint on confidentiality, Sourour's situation would be a time that breaking confidentiality would be ethical.

Looking at this case from a Contractarianism perspective, many things could have been done to prevent the outcome of the quiz. Sourour broke the social contracts that were in place when he disregarded the prima facie he has as an engineer with the public. In this situation, Sourour should have realized the social contract he has to maintain the welfare of the public. If he had acknowledged it then he could have challenged the completion of the quiz. This would have prevented the public from being taken advantage of. The public and users of the website ultimately got fooled into purchasing a medication that they thought was recommended to them out of good faith. Additionally, if Sourour acted in a contractarian way then he would have upheld his social contract with the public by informing them about how the quiz worked.

Professionals in all types of careers must abide by some type of code of ethics. While a code of ethics sets a standard for how professionals should conduct themselves it doesn't cover all aspects of the profession. This can lead to situations or grey areas where ethical dilemmas can arise. The best thing a professional can do is balance the internal obligations they have to their company as well as balance the external obligations they have to the public. In the case of Sourour, he was morally wrong for writing the code for the quiz. He failed to balance the social

contract or obligation he had with the public. Impeding on the overall welfare of the public by coding the pharmaceutical quiz in the nature he did. While it can be seen that it is not Sourour's fault because he was only doing what he was told to do. He has a moral and social responsibility to mitigate the harm his code can create. Ultimately, making Sourour partially responsible for the creation of the quiz and any effect it has on the public welfare.

## Reference

MB;, Armstrong. "Confidentiality: A Comparison across the Professions of Medicine, Engineering and Accounting." Professional Ethics (Gainesville, Fla.), U.S. National Library of Medicine, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11660061/>.