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Bill Sourour was tasked by his company to create a piece of interactive code for a marketing firm in Canada. The code was to directly target teenage girls for a pharmaceutical drug manufactured by the marketing firm's client. A series of questions would lead the young women through to an answer if this drug was right for them. Sourour quickly found out, the only answer to the questions was the client's drug. Sourour's piece of code was actually not a questionnaire designed to help teenage girls but rather to simply promote one drug as the only solution and it turns out this drug had grave side effects including "severe depression and suicidal thoughts." (Sourour, p. 5) People who write code are "often one of the last lines of defense against potentially dangerous and unethical practices" (Sourour, p. 6). Coders have an ethical duty to speak up and out before creating code with unethical repercussions. A questionnaire aimed at naïve teenage girls having physical or mental issues being manipulated by a pharmaceutical company to promote only one solution for a medical issue is wrong. In this Case Analysis I will argue that Utilitarianism shows us that the code was morally problematic because it was directly vulnerable teenage girls to only one drug option for health concerns, and that Sourour should not have done anything differently because there was a side effect of deep depression and suicide but what if the majority of women were helped by the drug. Utilitarianism states "happiness is good, suffering is bad, and that therefore we should promote the greatest good for the greatest number, this means that we can't play favorites" (Utilitarianism, class ethical tool).

One of the central concepts of the Code of Ethics adopted by the ACM Council is to “contribute to society and human well-being” (ACM, p. 2). This concept states “when designing or implementing systems, computing professionals must attempt to ensure that the products of their efforts will be used in socially responsible ways, will meet social needs, and will avoid harmful effects to health and welfare” (ACM, p. 2). A person creating code should also do everything possible to create code that has no negative effects on society and human well-being and will try to minimize the harm done to people’s health and well-being. Code will also need to take into account a safe natural environment. This means not creating code that could damage the environment. Another central tool is to avoid harm to others. The code of ethics also made sure to define harm for us: “‘Harm’ means injury or negative consequences, such as undesirable loss of information, loss of property, property damage, or unwanted environmental impacts” (ACM, p 2). Not only does ACM mean harm as in physical or mental harm, but they also say that financial or environmental impacts is included. You want to “undo or mitigate the negative consequences as much as possible” (ACM, p 2).

The ethical codes can show us in what ways Bill Sourour should have acted, with regard to how he should have written the code, or if he should have even taken the request. From the ethical code concept of Contributing to society and human well-being, we can see that Bill Sourour did not follow this ethical code. Sourour was given the requirements of the website, which also contained the requirements for the quiz. Sourour knew that the quiz would always point you towards taking the drug no matter what choice you would put as your answer. Sourour did not think to question why there are no exceptions besides allergies and did not bat an eye when his project manager did not have a good reaction to the quiz answers. He did not begin to think about what sort of effects advertising like this could have on society and was not bothered by the website requirements. Another code is about avoiding harm to others, and I do not see how Sourour abided by this rule. He did not think of any side effects that the drug could have.

For example, even though it was extreme to have suicidal side effects from a drug, Sourour should have questioned why there were not any mentioned in the quiz.

Sourour wanted to avoid hurting any teenage girls needlessly with his interactive quiz since deep depression and suicide are very bad. The problem Sourour has when related to Utilitarianism is that this drug might have helped more people than hurt. You want to maximize the greatest outcome even if a few did experience very bad side effects. If many more lives were saved or improved, would not Utilitarianism, say we should not prevent many from benefitting from a drug if a few do not? Sourour was fine when he thought he was just marketing the drug on behalf of a pharmaceutical company even though he knew it was promoting only one drug. He felt horrible remorse when he learned a young woman had killed herself. But, what if thousands more were actually helped by this pharmaceutical? Would Utilitarianism not say we need to maximize the amount of good in the world. Even though the Code of Ethics says never to do harm or you must positively contribute to society and well-being, Utilitarianism would say look at the greatest number helped would be the best outcome. Sometimes the greatest good in the world would also most positively affect society and peoples well-being.

Mary Beth Armstrong talks about professional confidentiality. Professionals like engineers, doctors, and accountants are held to certain standards and have in-depth training and education to be part of the profession. They should use their particular expertise to help people and not harm and "Keeping professional secrets or confidences has long been considered to be in the public interest"(Armstrong, p. 71). There is the professional duty to protect clients, but what if the larger society is harmed if this confidentiality is kept, and should a professional "blow the whistle." There are two different types of duties outlined by Armstrong, which are positive duties and negative duties. Positive duties "are obligations to bring about good" (Armstrong, p. 73) and require an action by the professional to bring about that good.

Negative duties are “duties to not harm or not to do bad” (Armstrong, p. 73), which require inaction or upholding to the rules. Another one of the ideas is “Magnitude of consequences” in which a professional weighs the consequences of a positive duty vs a negative duty. Sometimes confidentiality needs to be breached as when there is a high probability of major harm but maybe not when there is a low probability of minor harm.

We can use the different types of duties to analyze what types of actions Sourour took before and after the website was built. First, we can see a couple of examples of how Sourour did and did not display a positive duty. When Sourour talked to his sister about her being on this drug, he advised her to stop taking the drug. This example displays Sourour’s positive duty to bring about good by preventing his sister from taking a potentially harmful drug. Next, we can also see examples of negative duties being shown in this case. One example is when he was just doing his job, by doing his job and creating a website to help advertise a drug, he probably thought that the drug was intended to help people. This would be a negative duty if the drug in fact did not harm people, but some people had some serious adverse effects from taking the drug and faced serious harm. This harm caused it not be a negative duty, because a negative is a duty to not cause harm. Sourour also did not breach any confidentiality because he weighed out the harm and thought that there was no harm to the drug.

Engineers have a duty to keep their client’s information confidential but what if the larger society would be impacted by the work of a professional engineer in a negative way? Engineers build bridges and structures that tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, use daily. If there is a design flaw, engineers need to protect the public’s safety even if there are other conflicting duties. Utilitarianism would say a safe bridge is more important than a professional confidentiality breach since more people are affected if the bridge is broken. Armstrong described there being a social contract between professionals and society. A professional must

keep his confidentiality but also “promise to act in the public's interest.” (Armstrong, p. 86).

Armstrong most likely would suggest Sourour has a duty to protect society since this drug he is writing code for can cause side effects like suicide. But, thinking about a utilitarian, should he give up professional ideals if very few people have this side effect even if it is the major side effect? A utilitarian would probably say that the drug is good if the amount of people being saved outweighs the amount of people being harmed by the drug.

There are many things I would suggest that Sourour could have done differently, but I would have to know more about the drug specifically and the people being affected. How rare are the suicides and deep depression? Were the people who did have depression while taking the drug not have it before, or did the drug just make the depression worse? The one issue that I have with the Utilitarianism argument for Sourour creating the code is this is such a delicate issue, such as healthcare and suicide, that you do need to know whether more people were helped or harmed. We do not know the answer based on Sourour's article. Were ten girls hurt and thousands saved by the drug or was it the other way around? Is Utilitarianism flawed when it comes to preventing one suicide even if many more were helped? Utilitarianism really does require a lot of data, if you want to actually use Utilitarianism on society. Because you need to know exactly how many people were helped or hurt. We could say that Sourour did the right thing if a lot more people were helped than hurt, from a utilitarian standpoint. If the suicides actually were more common than just a couple of people, and the benefits of the drug were not that great, then Sourour could have done some things differently. He could have directly asked the company about the drug, to see if what he was doing was actually for the good of society.