

# Professional Identity in Nursing



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## Scenario 6 – Values & Ethics Domain

**Summary:** Nurse Cheryl, who has never had to care for an inmate from the nearby prison, has an inmate who is dying from end-stage liver disease. The patient is also being guarded by a law enforcement officer. She takes issue with the patient being handcuffed to the bed and pleads with the guard to uncuff him in his last few minutes of life so he will be able to pass with dignity. Her charge nurse supports this decision. Eventually, they get the guard to agree. Cheryl sits with the patient as he passes.

**CHARGE NURSE:** Hey, Cheryl. Glad you're here. Quick report—you have a 45-year-old male patient who was admitted from our local prison. He has end-stage liver disease. Just to make you aware, he does have a prison guard that's in the room with him, and he is shackled with handcuffs to the bed. He is a DNR. Okay?

**CHERYL:** Okay.

**CHARGE NURSE:** All right, any questions?

**CHERYL:** I've just never had anybody from the prison before, so we'll see what happens.

**CHARGE NURSE:** Good luck.

**CHERYL:** Thanks. (Cheryl goes into patient room and starts checking on patient/equipment. Turns to guard.) Excuse me, Deputy?

**GUARD:** Mm-hmm?

**CHERYL:** I'm sorry, are these handcuffs really necessary?

**GUARD:** Yes.

**CHERYL:** This guy is really close to the end of his life and I don't think he's going anywhere, so—can we get those off?

**GUARD:** I'm sorry, I can't take those off. This man's a prisoner. He has to remain shackled at all times.

**CHERYL:** Really? I mean, he's not going anywhere.

**GUARD:** It's important that he stay shackled all the time.

**CHERYL:** All right. (Goes to speak to the charge nurse.) I know you're in charge today, and I've got this guy who's dying of end-stage liver disease, and he's really close to the end of his life. The guard in the room won't take his handcuffs off, and I just really feel that they aren't necessary. Where's he going to go? Any advice?

**CHARGE NURSE:** Sure. So is this your first time having a--?

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**CHERYL:** Yeah.

**CHARGE NURSE:** Okay. It's really uncomfortable to be in that situation the first time, so I'm glad you came to me. So I rounded on him early, and he seemed pretty unresponsive to me at the time. As the charge nurse, I have to keep the whole floor safe, so I want to balance his needs with your safety, and the safety of the rest of the patients and staff. Make sense?

**CHERYL:** Yeah.

**CHARGE NURSE:** So just tell me a little bit about right now—what is your sense of how he is?

**CHERYL:** He's very close to the end. He's kind of having that apneic breathing, he's unresponsive, and I just think that, for his dignity, he didn't have the handcuffs on at the very end.

**CHARGE NURSE:** Sure. That sounds very reasonable to me. I think your judgment is correct. Are you comfortable going back in and talking to the deputy or would you like me to be with you?

**CHERYL:** I'll go ask him again. Thank you so much for the support and the advice. I appreciate it.

**CHARGE NURSE:** Good luck and come back if you need more help. (Cheryl returns to the patient's room.)

**CHERYL:** Wow, those respirations just aren't happening very frequently. (Turns to guard.) Deputy, I just want to ask one more time—I talked to my charge nurse, and this guy is going to die in the next few minutes, and you know, he's somebody's child. I really don't know what happened or why he was in prison, and it really doesn't matter. He's a human, he's a person, and I just want him to know that someone was there with him at the end. If you could just take off his handcuffs, we would really appreciate it. I know that you have rules.

**GUARD:** I do have rules, ma'am, that I have to follow. Statute 137.54 requires that he remain shackled. I have to follow the rules.

**CHERYL:** And I understand that. I appreciate it completely, because you know, we have rules as well in health care, it's just really, as a person, as a human, I think it's going to be a few minutes and he's going to be gone. Just for his dignity, I'd really appreciate it if you could just take those off. (Finally, guard uncuffs the patient.) Thank you so much. (She sits with patient while he passes.)