

# The ABC Toolbox in Practice

The case of Lina:  
Should a difficult prognosis be  
disclosed to an adolescent girl?

[www.bioethicscasebook.sg](http://www.bioethicscasebook.sg)



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# How to use this presentation

## Lina



The screenshot shows the ABC Toolbox website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Case, Backgrounds, Topics, and Teaching & Learning Guide. The main content area features a red header with the title "Lina" and a sub-header "This case concerns an adolescent with recurrent leukaemia, and physician-parent conflicts over her treatment plan. It explores the rights of the adolescent patient and the possibility, consequences and ethics of seeking judicial intervention in the best interests of a child." Below this, there is a photograph of a young girl lying in a hospital bed. The page is divided into several sections: "Case Description", "Alternative or complementary", "The voice of the child", "A paediatrician's perspective", and "Topics Covered". The "Case Description" section contains text about Lina's medical history and her parents' concerns. The "Topics Covered" section lists key ethical issues such as clarifying diagnosis and goals of care, conflict within family or between family and team, decisions about potentially life-sustaining treatments, financial consequences of treatment, and hospital emergency and...

[www.bioethicscasebook.sg/case/lina/](http://www.bioethicscasebook.sg/case/lina/)

- The ABC Toolbox is designed to help you make difficult ethical decisions that arise in your practice
- This presentation provides a worked example of how the ABC Toolbox can be applied to think through an ethical question raised in a specific situation
- It will be helpful to have the Lina case to hand when following this presentation

# Lina: an ethical question



- Lina's mother, Mrs Tan, has asked Dr Rosario to withhold information about Lina's worsening condition from her daughter. Lina has asked Dr Rosario for the truth about her prognosis.

An ethical question:

- How should Dr Rosario respond to the requests made by Mrs Tan and Lina?

# Tool A: Analysing facts and values

- The first step is to get clear about the different facts and values that are relevant in the case
- This can help to clarify whether the difficult decision you are facing is an ethical decision

## What might be the relevant facts in the case presented?

- Mrs Tan has requested that information about Lina's worsening condition be withheld from her daughter
- Mrs Tan thinks that this will be best for her daughter
- Lina has requested to know the truth about her condition
- Lina can understand this information and will find it distressing

# Tool A: Analysing facts and values

- Both facts and values will be important in working out what decision you ought to make

What are the relevant values in the case presented?

- Deceiving Lina is wrong
- Not causing distress to Lina is good
- Mrs Tan's right as a parent to make decisions about Lina's life is important

# Tool A: Analysing facts and values

- Are the facts and value statements correct? Is there anything missing?

What might be the relevant facts in the case presented?

- Mrs Tan has requested that information about Lina's worsening condition be withheld from her daughter
  - ▶ **Mrs Tan thinks that this will be best for her daughter**
- Lina has requested to know the truth about her condition
  - ▶ **Lina can understand this information and will find it distressing**

# Tool B: Balancing principles & intuitions

- What are your intuitions in this situation? Should Lina be told, or not?
- What do you feel is the right thing to do? How would you articulate this feeling and how might you defend it?
- Moving from intuitions to principles – and back again
  - *Identify the relevant principles, and use these to challenge your intuitions*
  - *Be prepared to modify how these principles are interpreted on the basis of your intuitions*

# Tool B: Balancing principles & intuitions

## Principle 1: Respect for persons

- What action most respects Lina's autonomy?
  - *Is Lina able to understand this information?*
  - *Does Lina have the maturity to make sense of the implications of this information for her future?*
- Aside from autonomy, are there any other considerations about respecting Lina as a person that apply here?
  - *Does respecting Lina's dignity require the information to be shared with her, even if she cannot understand the implications for her future?*



# Tool B: Balancing principles & intuitions

## Principles 2 and 3: Beneficence and non-maleficence

- Will Lina's well-being be enhanced by being told the truth about her condition, or by withholding this information?
  - *What are the benefits to Lina from being told her about prognosis?*
- Will harm be caused to Lina by telling her the truth, or by withholding this information?
  - *How distressed will Lina become if she is told about her prognosis?*

# Tool B: Balancing principles & intuitions

## Principle 4: Justice

- Are there any considerations of fairness to take into account?
  - *Do either of the two options impact unfairly on the care of other persons?*
  - *Would the decision to go against Mrs Tan's wishes not to tell Lina involve treating Mrs Tan unfairly?*

# Tool B: Balancing principles & intuitions

## Balancing principles

- How should conflict between principles be dealt with?
  - *Give reasons why one principle should be accorded more weight than other principles in this situation*
- How can any 'moral damage' be managed?
  - *If the decision is made not to disclose the information: can Lina's autonomy and dignity be respected in other ways?*
  - *If the decision is made to disclose the information: can any harm caused to Lina be minimised, and can Lina's parents be treated fairly in making this disclosure?*
- Finally: re-visit your intuitions and those of your colleagues

# Tool C: Comparing cases

- Can you think of similar situations where you have faced this kind of difficulty?
  - *Did you decide differently in a similar situation?*
  - *Can you identify an ethical reason why this was so?*
- If Lina's circumstances were different, would you act differently? Why is this the case?
  - *If Lina was 6 years old, for example, or 21 years old?*
  - *If the information to be shared with Lina was less serious?*
  - *If Lina had requested not to know anything about her situation?*

# Applying the Toolkit

- The three tools outlined in this presentation are a decision aid – they will not produce a single right answer
- Following this toolbox will help to ensure that the difficult decisions you and your colleagues make in your practice are carefully thought through and ethical

# Thank you for listening

This presentation has been developed for the online casebook *Making Difficult Decisions with Patients and Families: A Singapore Casebook*

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and designed by Jacob Moses

