

mislead them in their clinical decisions. The clients should also be aware of this possibility because they have to decide whether to pay for a test of poor quality, not have a test at all or opt for investigations performed by an accredited but more expensive laboratory.

The introduction of testing for human genetic disease in Sri Lanka has raised many issues about the benefits of the tests. Further assessment is required to determine the true costs and benefits of such tests in developing countries where patients have to fund their tests.

Did I kill a man?

KISHORE SHAH

Matru Seva Hospital, 407/5 Nana Peth, Pune 411 002 INDIA email: kshahsky@gmail.com

When I refused to give a false certificate to a 15-year-old girl which stated that she was sick and therefore could not attend school for 15 days, little did I know that I was signing the death warrant of a man I had never seen in my life. Manjula, the girl, pleaded with me, saying that her teacher was very strict, but I did not relent. I firmly showed her the door.

Two months later, I had forgotten about Manjula, assuming that she must have got the certificate from some of my less rigid colleagues. Her mother suddenly brought me back into the picture. Manjula, she told me, was so scared of the teacher that she had not attended school for many days. Meanwhile, Krishna, a young man, eloped with the lonely girl. A police hunt subsequently forced him to bring her back. The abduction of a minor girl is a serious offence. A desperate Krishna committed suicide to avoid police action and infamy.

Did my refusal to issue a certificate somehow trigger this sequence of events? At the time, I was very clear that I did not wish to issue a false certificate. However, later events forced me to revisit my opinion. Was I too rigid? Should I have judged the need for a certificate keeping in mind the circumstances?

If someone had asked me to issue a certificate of sickness to avoid being present in court, I could have been justified in refusing it outright. If an employee wanted to use sick leave that was

lapsing, I would never have issued a certificate. But here was an innocent girl who only wanted to escape the wrath of a schoolteacher.

I could not have foreseen the events that unfolded. However, I could have at least perceived that she did not ask for the certificate for monetary or any other gain. By issuing the certificate, I was not going to harm or cause any loss to anyone. Maybe I could have asked Manjula to bring along her mother before issuing the false certificate. Perhaps I could then have felt satisfied that I had done my duty by informing the parent.

Are we sometimes too rigid in implementing the law? Do we follow it more in letter than in spirit? Making exceptions to any law can, of course, be dangerous. An ultrasonologist may justify doing a sex determination test by saying that the mother did not intend to perform an MTP. Or that she already had five female children and it was humane to perform the sex determination and even an MTP. To extend the analogy, should euthanasia not be banned and instead be performed after considering the specifics of each case?

I still debate with myself. Did I do the right thing? Would Krishna still be alive if I had given the certificate? I do not have an answer.

(All names have been changed to protect identities.)