

## **Medical Decision Making during Pregnancy: A Case Study**

By Maya Dassanayake

The links below pertain to the case of a pregnant woman who was ordered by a judge to remain in the hospital against her will after she went into premature labor. The main ethical point of this case is to determine who has control of a woman's body during pregnancy. In this case, if a pregnant woman endangers the health of her fetus through certain health practices, should the state and her doctor be able to exercise greater control over her body and behaviors in order to protect the fetus? This case explores aspects of autonomy, or the balance within the patient-physician relationship over who has the power to make certain decisions. It also raises questions about the state's role in medical decision-making. The case considers the questions of when life begins, and which patient takes precedent during pregnancy, the mother or the fetus.

Pregnant woman's involuntary hospitalization raises legal, ethical, medical questions,  
*Tampa Bay Times*

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/health/pregnant-womans-involuntary-hospitalization-raises-legal-ethical-medical/1068455>

<https://www.aclu.org/reproductive-freedom/florida-court-upholds-right-pregnant-woman-determine-medical-care>

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the implications of this case on the abortion debate?
2. What kind of early interventions could be used during prenatal counseling to try to avoid similar cases?
3. "Can a doctor's order to quit smoking and rest in bed trump a woman's right to control her own body?"
4. To what extent can this kind of order be enforced? (i.e. forcible restraint)
5. Do you agree with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in that such legal sanctions may discourage women from seeking healthcare? How could such laws affect a woman's decision to seek medical care?
6. What would you do if you had a pregnant patient engaged in risky behaviors that threatened the viability of her fetus?