

Scenario 4

Dr. Martin Langston is a 33-year-old anesthesiologist caring for an anesthetized 60-year old patient while Dr. Sam Poterucha performs a distal pancreatectomy for chronic pancreatitis and a disrupted pancreatic duct. There has been approximately a liter of blood loss and the resection has not yet been completed. More blood loss is anticipated. The patient's blood pressure is slowly decreasing and his heart rate has increased.

Dr. Langston: Sam, I'm estimating about a liter blood loss. How are you doing in there?

Dr. Poterucha: You've got to be wrong. I couldn't possibly have lost a liter. And we'll have this specimen out in just a few minutes.

Dr. Langston: We started with a Hb of 9.4. I'm going to transfuse a unit of RBCs.

Dr. Poterucha: I'm telling you that you're wrong -- we haven't lost that much blood and he doesn't need any RBCs.

Dr. Langston: Sam, his blood pressure is sagging a little and it looks as if you're losing blood pretty briskly there. He really needs the blood.

Dr. Poterucha: Martin, I'm telling you to not give any. Give him some more crystalloid or Hetastarch. He doesn't need any blood.

Dr. Langston: He's hypotensive and I'll bet his Hb is below 7.0 at this time. He really need some red cells -- and right now.

Dr. Poterucha: This is my patient! And I'm telling you he doesn't need it.

Dr. Langston: Sam, what's your problem?

Dr. Poterucha: Look, this is MY patient. I'm in charge. He'll be fine. Don't give him any blood.

Dr. Langston: Something wrong at home, Sam? You're acting really goofy. I'm hanging the blood now.

Dr. Poterucha (very loudly): Someone go out in the hall and get Dr. Clancy right now!

Dr. Poterucha asks his assistant to hold pressure on the surgical site, steps back, and removes his gown.

Dr. Poterucha: Take down that blood! I'm going to have the patient charge you with assault and battery. You have no right to transfuse this patient without my consent.

Dr. Poterucha shoves Dr. Langston.

Dr. Langston: You touch me or interfere again, Sam, you're a dead man.

Dr. Clancy enters the room and steps between the two men.

Outcome: Dr. Clancy did get involved and relieved Dr. Langston. Dr. Poterucha completed the procedure. Immediately after the procedure, Dr. Clancy drew an arterial blood sample. The Hb was found to be 6.9 mg/dL and the patient was acidotic with a pH of 7.16. Before the issue of potential transfusion of RBCs could be resolved, the patient developed acute chest pain and significant ST changes. He was rushed to the hospital's cardiac procedure area when he received two units of RBCs from the anesthesia team there while the cardiologists placed three coronary artery stents.

The patient was discharged on postoperative day 16. He subsequently filed a malpractice lawsuit against all involved parties. On the fourth postoperative year, a jury awarded the patient \$850,000. Drs. Langston and Clancy were dismissed as defendants.

Neither Dr. Langston nor Clancy were subject to disciplinary actions by the hospital or state medical board. Dr. Poterucha lost his hospital privileges, had his medical license suspended for two months, and underwent medical board-required anger management courses.