

Discussion

Are there limits to conscientious objection? Read the following two short cases, then see the discussion prompt at the end.

CASE ONE

Taken from [Virtual Mentor](#), the ethics journal of the [American Medical Association](#):

Medical School Accommodations for Religious and Cultural Practices

Lori Arviso Alvord, MD

Joni had looked forward to her second-look medical school visit with excitement; this school had been her top choice throughout the application process. The first in her family to finish college, Joni felt as if she was carrying enough hopes and expectations for ten people. She was pushing through her last courses with characteristic tenacity. And every day this week, she had worn the silver and turquoise squash blossom necklace that her grandmother gave her before she left for school.

Now, she stood with her fellow accepted students in a cold room with tiled floors, necklace stashed away and her long black hair tied back. The students were passing around a prosection that one of the teaching assistants had given them. It was small and firm, a dusky red—as it got closer, Joni could see that it was a heart. When it got to her, she felt her gloved hands leave her side almost automatically. Then she stopped, quickly shook her head and motioned to the student next in line. Her classmate hesitated for a moment and stood holding the heart, but after a moment passed it in front of Joni to the next student at the tank.

Later that day Joni walked into the lab director's office. She shook his hand and introduced herself.

"Welcome. Hope you've had a good day so far. What is it you would like to talk to me about?" he asked.

Joni was quiet, then gathered her courage. "I'm Navajo. Our cultural beliefs do not allow us to touch dead bodies," she said gently.

The lab director seemed genuinely puzzled. "Well, I don't think that this is something that we have encountered before. We have had one or two students find out that they were bothered by the lab, but we always worked through that discomfort...it was an important learning experience."

Virtual Mentor. March 2013, Volume 15, Number 3.

[Read the full commentary »](#)

CASE TWO

Scientology is a rare sect in the United States which does not believe that psychiatric conditions such as clinical depression exist.

Taken from the official [Church of Scientology website](#):

It is now routine psychiatric practice to label and stigmatize youth with wholesale diagnoses of mental disorders. It is staggeringly profitable business. But while psychiatrists rake in billions, society receives a new generation of life-long drug addicts and thus still more customers for psychotropic drugs.

Today, the marketing of antidepressants has likewise reached nightmarish proportions, and the scenario becomes even more disturbing when one considers the explosively violent episodes such drugs precipitate. Moreover, there is categorically no evidence that diseases such drugs claim to treat even exist—which is to say, it's all an elaborate and deadly hoax.

This is not "Scientology belief" or "opinion." This is fact and this is why Scientologists oppose psychiatric abuse.

[Original source »](#)

For case two, suppose that a psychiatrist who belongs to the sect of Scientology refused to prescribe medication for severe clinical depression due to his belief.

**Do you have different thoughts or reactions to case one and case two?
Compare the two cases.**