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Case: When comedy crosses the line

The Australian DJs Mel Greig and Michael Christian of 2day FM Australia called the hospital Kate Middleton was admitted into for severe morning sickness. The DJs were pretending to be the queen of England and Prince Charles to gain information about the princess’ medical condition. Their call was taken by a nurse from the hospital and transferred to the nurse tending to Kate. When the nurse found out the call was a hoax live on air she felt terrible and later committed suicide.

The London’s Metropolitan Police submitted a file to Britain’s Crown Prosecution service “to consider whether any potential offenses may have been committed by making the hoax call” (Satter Dec 2012). Mel and Michael apologized for the incident; they never thought their call would be put through, they simply got lucky. There is no chance any potential offenses have been committed. They did not pressure the nurse to give them information about the princess.

Some would like to think the suicide is the DJs responsibility. The nurse killed herself; nobody pressured her to end her life. She wasn’t harassed on air. The DJs did nothing wrong by playing a prank on the hospital staff. Canadian broadcasters defended their Australian colleagues by saying “they did not cross any ethical line and should not be held responsible for her death” (Gollum Dec 2012). It is true Mel and Michael did not cross any ethical line when it comes the prank. They called the hospital as a joke and had no intentions of hurting the nurse. The nurse must have already had some issues within herself if a joke of that nature makes her feel like she needs to end her life because “at no point did the Palace complain to the hospital about the incident” said their Royal Highnesses (Ravitz Dec, 2012). This means nobody was blaming her for releasing information on air.

In radio and other media outlets there are ethical lines that should not be crossed as a sign of respect to the public and the content being given. According to the executive director of the CBSC there is “no specific prohibition within the content of our rules or codes” when it comes to prank calls (Gollum, Dec 2012). Mel and Michael had good intentions to get information about Kate Middleton’s morning sickness and share it with the public.

It would be a different story if they were calling the hospital daily and harassing the nurses for information but it wasn’t like that at all. They went along with the joke and did nothing to carry out the joke in an inappropriate way.

References

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