Upon being presented with Mr. S’ case and findings, then discussing it with my attending physician, I support the attending physician writing the prescription of Viagra for Mr. S. Using the principles of beneficence and autonomy and what they mean, I will defend my decision and explain how these principles make it ethically justifiable.

Besides the obvious meaning of benefiting others, beneficence stands for “promoting someone else’s good or welfare.”(1) Occasionally, taking care of a patient and doing what’s best for them might not be in accordance with your own desires. Nevertheless, the “call of duty” will pull us back into focusing on the patients’ requests. With Mr. S’ case, one can argue that since he does not admit to sexual dysfunction, he shouldn’t take Viagra. However, taking into consideration that it’s very common for patients to not discuss sensitive topics or admit to something that might be embarrassing, you can also argue that he might be withholding this information and that Viagra is something he needs to feel better. According to the World Health Organization, health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.”(1) In Mr. S’s case, his issue would be that of a social one since it involves his sexual life with his wife. With this definition of health, and beneficence entailing the concept of benefiting a patient’s health, giving Mr. S a prescription for Viagra to make him “feel like more of a man” would be in accordance with the very principle of beneficence since it would improve his social well-being. And, if in fact he were suffering from sexual dysfunction, it would improve his physical and mental health as well when he sees results. Like the attending physician said, it is possible that his depression medication might have given him side effects that he doesn’t want to admit to. Since Viagra is low-risk, there is no serious harm for Mr. S to be taking. Additionally, if he is not actually experiencing sexual dysfunction, he might realize Viagra isn’t improving anything, and decide not to use it again.

In addition to beneficence justifying the prescription, patient autonomy is a critical point to consider in regards to treatment. “Autonomy means self-determination, the right to make independent decisions concerning one’s own life and well being.”(2) This general definition of autonomy can be expanded into four aspects: “autonomy as free action, autonomy as effective deliberation, autonomy as authenticity, and autonomy as moral reflection.”(2) We can explore two of these aspects with Mr. S’ case to justify the Viagra prescription. Using the free action definition, which is essentially “very similar in meaning to liberty,” we can say that giving Mr. S the prescription would be a way of not depriving him of his freedom to do as he wishes. Denying him the prescription would be causing an “obstacle [for] his freedom.” Mr. S’ requested this to improve his sexual life and refusing to help with something that could be bothering the patient, such as manhood in this case, seems to be an interference with his autonomy. Secondly, autonomy as moral reflection is shown in Mr. S’ request because his sexual life is something he clearly values and the “impact of [his] decision on others,” would in this sense, be one that isn’t selfish. In fact, his intention is to improve his sexual life with his wife, so he would be trying to please her as well. At the end of the day, Mr. S is an adult that is “sufficiently mature or competent to make [his] own decisions based on what [he] values and what [he] believes to be good.” (1)

Therefore, based on the principles of beneficence and these two aspects of autonomy, giving Mr. S the Viagra prescription is ethically justified.

References

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2. Yeo, M et al. (2010). Autonomy [selections]. In M Yeo et al. (eds.). Concepts and Cases in Nursing Ethics. [3rd edition] Ontario: Broadview Press, pp. 91-97, 103-109.