

Is The First Family's Health Our Business?



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — May 15, 2018



By U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Gabriel Silva - Public Domain [1]

There is no denying when public figures experience medical issues they can draw greater awareness and attention toward disease prevention; informing society and providing beneficial education. But, the [hospitalization of the First Lady](#), [2] who is thankfully expected to make a full recovery for a “benign kidney condition,” raises concerns surrounding the intersection of patient privacy and a loved one seeking and holding elective office. Should an unelected citizen be unduly compelled to reveal any aspect of their health status?

Many would argue that when someone runs for public office, everything is fair game. Perhaps it is time to re-examine that issue. Where does it say that politicians or those who love them forgo their right to protected, privileged healthcare and communications that the rest of society steadfastly values? Where does it say that to guarantee some privacy they must resort to distraction or subterfuge compounding an already stressful situation?

As many media outlets have reported, the President waited till the conclusion of the procedure to visit his wife at the hospital because the “press pool has to follow him wherever he goes” was the refrain. Think about that for a moment.

What if a spouse, child or another family member of a President is given a dire prognosis or requires a particularly risky operation. Is it ethical to add an additional burden, the cloak and dagger maneuvers aimed at maintaining privacy especially during crucial, often emotionally overwhelming early stages of diagnosis? Is depriving the patient of family support to guarantee information remains protected, even if later released at their discretion, worth the additional strain or pressure it generates?

The media has done a relatively good job when it comes to Presidents' children being off limits. With all of the Presidents that have resided in the White House, it is unlikely their children had completely uneventful childhoods. This must be evidence that the press places a premium and value on being on the right side of bioethics.

Isn't it time we reflect through our actions the humane society we so desire? A person undergoing medical treatment is vulnerable and existentially stressed. No matter who the patient is, shouldn't their choices and disclosure be entirely at their discretion without external influence? Given the respectful coverage to date regarding Mrs. Trump's hospitalization, it seems like civility is within our grasp. And, that's progress.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/15/first-familys-health-our-business-12964>

Links

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melania_Trump#/media/File:Donald_and_Melania_Inaugural_parade_01-20-17.jpg

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/14/melania-trump%E2%80%99s-hospitalization-reflects-medical-progress-12960>