In recent years, several cases involving adolescent patients refusing life-saving treatment (blood transfusions, cancer treatment) have been covered by national media outlets, raising questions about the role of the adolescent in medical decision-making. Should adolescents be allowed to refuse life-saving medical treatment? Does it matter whether their parents agree or disagree with their decision? Does the age of the adolescent matter? Using several case studies, we will discuss whether adolescents, as a rule, possess capacity of sufficient quality that their decisions should be respected even in the case of life-altering medical decisions. This session will touch on the traditional approach to determining when adolescents should have their decisions respected (including what the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Bioethics has said), the evolving understanding of adolescent brain development, and the implications of that “brain science” for how we should understand adolescent decision-making capacity.

Please contact linda.carrlee@hsc.utah.edu for a pdf of the background reading for this event, “Adolescent Refusal of Lifesaving Treatment: Are We Asking the Right Questions?” by Douglas Diekema, MD, MPH. (Adolesc Med 022 (2011) 213-228)

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For those interested Dr. Diekema will also present "When Parents and Providers Disagree: Understanding and Responding to Conflicts in the Care of Children" for Pediatric Grand Rounds the next morning, Thurs., Feb. 1st, 3rd floor PCH auditorium, 8am-9am.