

DANVILLE AIRLINES

In a matter of hours, Julie Taylor, director of Human Resources at Danville Airlines in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, would have to make a difficult recommendation to the airline's board of directors. One of the airline's best pilots, David Reiger, 42, had recently lost his father to Huntington's disease, a progressive, inherited neurological disorder that causes severe movement disorder and eventual dementia. Danville officials had been concerned about Reiger's susceptibility to Huntington's. In a routine blood test for alcohol and drug use, Danville had determined—after discreetly sending the blood elsewhere to be tested—that Reiger did indeed have the gene for Huntington's disease. That meant that, at some point, Reiger would develop the disease. The airline had then informed Reiger that he had the gene. Furious that Danville had tested him without his consent, Reiger insisted that he be allowed to keep flying despite the discovery. If he developed Huntington's while still flying for the airline, Reiger told Danville, he was willing to be reassigned to a position in the company that did not involve flying. He had threatened legal action if Danville grounded him before any symptoms appeared. The Danville Board of Directors had asked Taylor for a recommendation on how to handle the situation. She investigated and found there was no established protocol for dealing with this type of situation within Danville Airlines or the airline industry in general. As she contemplated her choices, Taylor felt a huge headache coming on.

Huntington's Disease

Huntington's disease (HD) was discovered in 1872 by American physician George Huntington. The disease causes nerve cells in the brain to gradually deteriorate, leaving its victims incapacitated both physically and mentally; the prognosis is dementia and death. Symptoms include jerky movements, spasms, and increasing dementia (sometimes the depression caused by the disease transforms into schizophrenia). Over time, HD affects the patient's ability to walk, talk, and reason. The disease strikes men and women of all races and

This case is based on ideas and discussions with University of Washington students and prepared by Research Assistant Jenny Mead under the supervision of Andrew C. Wicks, Associate Professor of Business Administration. It was written as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. Copyright © 2004 by the University of Virginia Darden School Foundation, Charlottesville, VA. All rights reserved. To order copies, send an e-mail to sales@dardenpublishing.com. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the permission of the Darden School Foundation. ◇