

Only a year after being hired as news director of WEAU-TV in Eau Claire, WI, Glen Mabie found himself in an unenviable position. Mabie, who had been in the broadcast news business for 25 years, was told by the station's management that they were considering entering into an exclusive agreement with a local hospital, Sacred Heart. This agreement would limit the station's coverage of medical issues by using only employees of Sacred Heart Hospital, or the hospital's affiliates, in news stories on medical topics.

Arrangements like this one are becoming more common in the world of broadcast journalism. In the 2007 article "Epidemic," Trudy Lieberman of the *Columbia Journalism Review* examined this phenomenon and found that agreements between health systems and news stations were significantly deteriorating the quality of reporting on health issues, especially those which are critical of health care systems.

Although it was unclear whether the television station stood to benefit financially from the agreement with Sacred Heart, it was clear that such an arrangement, if completed, would significantly impact the content of the station's news coverage. Many on the WEAU-TV staff voiced opposition to this plan when it was originally announced in a staff meeting. As the news director, Mabie was torn between respecting the decisions of station ownership and management and staying true to his own journalistic ideals.

Ultimately, Mabie decided that the proposed agreement's potential control over news content was incompatible with his own journalistic ideals. In January 2008, he resigned his position as news director in protest. In the wake of Mabie's resignation, the station's management decided not to enter into an exclusive agreement with Sacred Heart Hospital.

1. What other courses of action could Mabie have taken? Do you think they would have been as effective?
2. Are exclusive coverage agreements such as this one ethical? Why or why not? Is your answer to this question affected by the fact that the agreement is with a hospital, and not a car dealership?
3. As news director, was Mabie obligated to support the decisions of the station's management? Why or why not?