You are part of a group of medical students who has been invited to spend a week at a large, local group cardiac practice. On your first day at the center, you are invited to sit in on a staff meeting. The staff is meeting to discuss some of the practices most difficult cases. The doctors, nurses, dietitians and physical therapists are trying to develop strategies and tactics for addressing individuals who are not, for various reasons, doing very well.

One case stands out in your mind. The patient is a 46 year old male. He is morbidly obese, a cigarette smoker, eats twice as much fat as is recommended on a daily basis and gets very little exercise.

This man has been a patient for over a year following two cardiac events. He has been referred to a dietitian in part for a program to help with his recovering from the events and to help him in weight loss. He has also been referred to one of the physical therapists to develop an exercise plan designed to help with the weight loss program and to improve his cardiovascular fitness. The staff has also worked with him on ways to stop smoking. He has also had regular appointments with his cardiologist and his primary care doctor.

To date he has made all of his appointments. He is never late for an appointment. He is always pleasant, appropriate and has promised to cooperate in his treatment. Unfortunately he has made no changes whatsoever in his lifestyle. While he says he will do whatever he is told, he has never made any real effort to stop smoking, change his eating habits or get exercise. He also will go days without taking his medication.

Considering the ethical and clinical issues, where should the practice go from here?