The Editor's Page

Lauren Pacelli
EDITOR'S PAGE

At the dawn of a new millenium, we enter medical and scientific frontiers once considered unimaginable. Advances in medical technology, while most often beneficial for those seeking treatment, present troubling issues for our society. With these advances, we confront numerous ethical and moral questions concerning the treatment of patients as they near the end of life.

The end-of-life debate reaches into all aspects of society. Within a legal framework, courts must resolve family disputes centered on whether to continue the life of a loved one. The political landscape on this subject can be seen most recently in Virginia, where Governor James Gilmore attempted to halt the removal of nutrition and hydration from a person in the persistent vegetative state.¹ Not simply a legal and political issue, the decision on whether to continue treatment for a family member has profound moral implications. The Catholic Church speaks to this issue in its literature regarding the end-of-life debate.²

The legal issues surrounding patients in the “minimally conscious” state, patients more responsive than those in the persistent vegetative state, have been presented in two recent court cases, In re Martin³ and In re Conservatorship of Wendland.⁴ Because the Journal of Contemporary Health Law & Policy is committed to providing a forum for discourse on this emerging health issue, we present an article co-authored by Drs. Lawrence Nelson and Ronald Cranford entitled, “Michael Martin and Robert Wendland: Beyond the Vegetative State.” The authors provide an insightful analysis of two court cases involving familial battles over the fate of two “minimally conscious” men, and proffer that families should have a legal right to withdraw nutrition and hydration from loved ones in this state.

To remain faithful to the mission of The Catholic University of America, the Journal is publishing a Pastoral Statement written by the

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National Conference of Catholic Bishops, clarifying the Catholic Church teachings on the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration. This statement explains that the dignity and value of human life is paramount in making treatment decisions that accord with Catholic moral principles. These principles are then applied to questions that arise as a result of advanced technology and life-prolonging treatment. These teachings are invaluable to those seeking guidance from the Catholic Church on this difficult issue. Contributing to this debate, a forthcoming article will be published in Volume XVI, Issue 1 of the *Journal of Contemporary Health Law & Policy* that responds to the issues presented in “Beyond the Vegetative State” from both a legal and Catholic perspective.

The *Journal* looks forward to exploring the end-of-life debate and does so in the spirit of the University's Mission Statement, recognizing that The Catholic University of America "welcomes the collaboration of all scholars of good will who, through the process of study and reflection, contribute to the aims [of the University] in an atmosphere of academic competence where freedom is fostered and where the only constraint upon truth is truth itself."^5^

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