



The Case of Terri Schiavo: Ethics at the End of Life

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After the Nancy Cruzan case was decided by the Supreme Court in 1990, and ultimately resolved by the Courts of the State of Missouri, the decision to withhold or withdraw life-prolonging nutrition and hydration appeared to many to be as noncontroversial as decisions to refuse respirators or dialysis. Even the Catholic Church held that, although there should be a presumption in favor of providing nutrition and hydration, the patient or the patient's surrogate could overrule this presumption, if either believed the treatment was disproportionate or burdensome.

The Schiavo case changed all that. Although the decision to remove Terri Schiavo's nutrition and hydration was made by her husband — her legal surrogate — based on his wife's belief that such treatment was disproportionate, Schiavo's immediate family protested so much that the case took years to resolve. It eventually involved all branches of government at both the state and federal levels.

The ethical dilemmas that such cases pose continue to stir great controversy. This in-depth examination of these dilemmas provides information and documentation from many perspectives. The editors have included a foreword by Dr. Jay Wolfson, Terri Schiavo's court-appointed guardian ad litem, as well as Dr. Wolfson's report to Gov. Jeb Bush on the case and Gov. Bush's reply; public statements by President George Bush and Senators David Weldon, Rick Santorum, Tom DeLay, Bill Frist, and Barney Frank; statements by the pope and other representatives of the Catholic Church on this issue; plus much medical and legal background material on both precedents to the Schiavo case and its aftermath, including the results of the autopsy report. For anyone wishing an in-depth understanding of these complex ethical issues, issues many of us will have to confront in our own families, this volume is indispensable.

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