



Case Study Two Tiny Tom

Tommy was an active three year old. He was originally diagnosed at 16 months with cancer which was treated with chemotherapy and radiation with good results. Now he has developed a tumor in the neck area which is causing pressure on the trachea or airway. There is no indication of any other spread of the cancer. He does not complain of pain, is alert and active, and obviously not in distress. The tumor is inoperable and is beginning to cause respiratory difficulty only when he is sleeping. He has been admitted to the hospital for placement of a tracheostomy tube in order to facilitate his breathing. After a lengthy conference the parents and physician decide it is time to discontinue aggressive treatment of the cancer. They decide that the tracheostomy is an extraordinary measure and choose not to have it done.

They also requested that in the event of a respiratory or cardiac arrest the child is not to be resuscitated. They recognize that when the child sleeps his breathing capacity is diminished and most likely he will have a respiratory arrest soon if treatment is withheld.

The parents call in the grandparents and other close family friends to have a party with the child that night. Afterwards, with the parent's knowledge and consent, the MD writes an order to start the child on a continuous infusion of intravenous morphine. Everyone involved, including the parents, are aware that morphine suppresses respiration. There is no indication of pain. Tommy is laughing and playing with his family.

Questions:

1. Is this euthanasia?
2. Should the nurse refuse to give the medication?
3. If you were the nurse, what would you do?
4. What would you do as a parent?