



Case Study Four Mr. A

Ninety eight year old grandfather, Mr. A. experienced a mild stroke three weeks previous to the meeting of the hospital ethics committee. Prior to the stroke, he was still very active (still able to drive his car and swim) and had stated that he want to live to be 100.

Because of the stroke, Mr. A. was unable to swallow, but was alert and able to communicate via simple yes and no questions and gestures. When asked by his physicians, he had indicated, "I want everything done. I want to live."

Yet, even though he had expressed such wishes, his 78 year old wife, Mrs. A., had durable power of attorney and chose, against medical advice, to bring him home to die, because she stated, "he would not want to be hooked to a feeding machine and that he was not currently in his right mind." In addition to having signed the durable power of attorney for health care, Mr. A. had checked the box on the form stating that he did not want any heroic procedures done.

After five days of no nutritional sustenance at home, Mr. A. was screaming in pain according to the granddaughter. At that time, the department of protective services was called, and with their persuasion, Mrs. A. re-admitted her husband to the hospital for the placement of a gastrostomy feeding tube.

Two days after the tube insertion and feedings were started, the granddaughter once again became concerned because Mrs. A. was requesting the tube be removed. As a result of the controversy over whether to have the feeding tube removed, the hospital ethics committee was consulted.

Question:

1. Who should be making the decision regarding Mr. A's health care, i.e. himself, his wife, the granddaughter or the hospital ethics committee?
2. Whose suffering should be considered in this decision, Mr. A. because of lack of nutrition or Mrs. A. in watching her husband be incapacitated and the possibility of him not having a full recovery to his previous activity level? What about the granddaughter's concerns?
3. Should Mr. A's previous request of "no heroics" be honored over and above his current request to have "everything done and wanting to live?" There did not seem to be any room allowed for this man to change his mind when faced with the prospect of hastening his own death.
4. How could Mr. A. and his family have prevented this situation?