



Case Study One Grandma M.

Grandma M. is 90 years old. She has lived independently until one year ago when she began to demonstrate evidence of senility. After a massive stroke she is left paralyzed on the left side, comatose, with no swallow or gag reflex. After a few weeks she seems more aware of her surroundings. She follows people with her eyes, but makes no other attempts to communicate. Since she is unable to be fed safely orally she is maintained nutritionally by nasogastric tube feedings. (A temporary tube is placed through her nose to her stomach.) After one year of no improvement or deterioration, she seems more restless. Frequently with her unaffected hand she pulls out the feeding tube and so must be restrained much of the time.

Questions:

1. Is she pulling the tube out because it is an irritation and uncomfortable or is she attempting to communicate to her family that she wants all treatment discontinued? If that is so, is she capable of making that decision with an understanding of the consequences (death by starvation)?
2. Should the family decide for her and request that the tube be removed?
3. What would you do if this was your mother or grandmother?