

An individuals right to refuse medical care

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The paper "Terri Schiavo's Case - One's Right to Refuse Medical Care, Ethical Issues, Health Policy Issues" is a breathtaking example of a case study on health sciences & medicine. In this piece, the following elements will be analyzed: the historical perspective (including a brief history of the Schiavo case through the judicial system and the legislature); a brief discussion on an individual's right to refuse medical care; and an identification and description of the moral and ethical issues present in the case; my ethical position relative to the issue; my defense of my stated ethical position; how parties (Terri, her husband, her parents, the medical staff, and taxpayers) would be affected by my ethical position; a discussion of the party that would have supported my decision and one that would have condemned my condition; the health policy considerations present in this case; a summary of the analysis; and a conclusion of what could have been done to avoid this ethical issue. These issues will be thoroughly discussed in the following sections—with an adequate analysis which will follow shortly.

II. The Historical Perspective (Judicial and Legislative) The historical perspective is, to be brief, the fact that Terri Schiavo had a head injury which significantly impaired her. An autopsy later revealed that her brain had no significant cognitive functioning, with no chance of recovery. Overall, "there is no easy fix that will make end-of-life decision making simple and conflict-free." ¹ Legislation was put through allowing for feeding-tube removal.

III. An Individual's Right to Refuse Medical Care

An individual has the right to refuse medical care, but usually, they will have to sign a form saying that they have been informed of their necessity for medical care—and are consciously making the decision not to receive

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medical care by outrightly refusing it. This has various potential outcomes, one of which is if appropriate medical treatment is not received, what will happen then?

IV. Identification and Description of Moral and Ethical Issues Present

The moral and ethical issues present include the following: whether someone can or cannot insert a feeding tube without the patient's consent; whether someone can or cannot insert an IV without the patient's consent; and whether or not someone can or cannot hydrate a patient without the patient's consent. Governor Jeb Bush passed "Terri's Law," stating that Terri's feeding tube could be removed—a legislative move.

V. My Ethical Position on the Issue

My ethical position on the issue is that Terri's feeding tube and hydration should not have been discontinued. In fact, I protested these end-of-life procedures when the Schiavo case was happening, in order to garner attention to how upset I felt that her rights were being violated.

VI. A Defense of My Ethical Position

The very basis of this ethical position is simple: any feeling being should not be denied food or water simply because there is little cognitive ability by the being. That is not the being's fault; that does not mean that Terri did not deserve to live simply because her cognitive ability level was relatively low. Even though the autopsy said her cognitive faculties had no significant power, now we will truly never know.

VII. How Different Parties Would Be Affected by My Ethical Position

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Different parties would be affected in several ways. Terri would ultimately live. Her husband would probably be miserable because he would have to own up to his obligations as a husband to a woman who was severely cognitively challenged—although he would have a chance to atone for the fact that he wanted to see her dead. Terri's parents would be happy she would be alive, to be sure. Taxpayers might not be crazy about keeping a severely cognitively impaired woman alive, nor would necessarily her medical care providers. However, people cannot be killed in the name of inconvenience. That's the bottom line.

VIII. Discussion of One Party Pro and One Party Con

One pro from one of the parties would be that, from Terri's standpoint—she would be alive! One con from one of the parties—in Michael Schiavo's case—would be that he would have to continue to care for his disabled wife.

IX. Health Policy Considerations

Health policy considerations that should have been thought about in advance include, for example: how people would regard highly cognitively disabled people after this case; and how end-of-life issues should be resolved by being fair to all parties involved.

X. Summary of the Analysis

Basically, the summary of my argument is that Terri Schiavo should not have been euthanized—basically being put to death by her feeding tube and dehydration having been taken out by force, due to law enforcement having passed a law that said that her feeding tube could be taken out.

XI. Conclusion of What Could Have Been Done to Avoid this Issue

This entire issue could have been avoided if Terri had not gotten this head injury—which was completely preventable. In order to avoid this issue, another aspect which could have been elemental is if Terri had left behind, in writing, her wishes or advance directives as to what she would have preferred to happen to her were she to become cognitively disabled in the manner that she did.