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Ethics Consults

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Rebecca Anderson



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Ethics Consults

- Rebecca Anderson

1.

The Saudi daughter, with her
carefully pinned scarf and face
asks again ever so politely for dialysis.
“If I don’t do everything I can for him,
I’m going straight to Hell.”

2.

Clowning on his mountain bike for his young son
he pitched head-first from a four-foot retaining wall
to the stone patio.
Now we wait for his family to gather.
“If I ever end up like this,” says the neurosurgeon,
“Smother me. Just smother me.”

3.

Her mother was a lush
and she has the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to prove it.
Pregnant at 19, she wants her tubes tied
after the delivery. Her doctor says no.
“If she’s retarded, she can’t consent.
If she’s smart enough to consent,
she’s smart enough to raise kids.”

4.

It began with an abscessed tooth, progressed
to necrotizing fasciitis; a year of going
on and off the vent. No end in sight.
“Stop,” she says, but never in front of her husband.
He’s content to leave her here, out of his hair.

5.

After a 15q deletion study using paternal DNA to distinguish chromosomal origin, the lab concluded dad wasn't dad.
"So is this guy supposed to go through life saddled with a retarded kid who's not his own?"

6.

The proxy has gone on a cruise. I e-mail about his frail, demented father gut half gone, losing ground, can't be weaned from the vent. The attending's pushing for a trach. What would his father want?
"I caught a cold from your nurses," he replies.

7.

At 820 pounds, he's marooned on the rented bed, staring up at the rented winch the nurses use to move him. He's gaining weight on 600 calories a day. They say he threatens to fall on them if they don't bring him food.

8.

Born eight weeks premature, the baby is the size of an eggplant. Her parents, unmarried, visit separately. He's asking what all the medications are for. "If we tell him they're for HIV, we'd be violating mom's privacy."

9.

By day three they've used up all the clotting factor in a five-state region. At sixty thousand dollars a vial, they're pushing a million in meds alone. What goes in by I.V. comes out by chelation. "Sure, it's off-label, but until somebody tells me No, I'm doing what I can."

10.

They came for a transplant evaluation but she's too far gone. Now she's on high-frequency vent and continuous dialysis. Her fingers, toes and brain are necrotic. "What does this mom need before she says, enough?" asks the chaplain. "Body parts falling off?"

11.

She's insisting on aggressive therapy for his terminal cancer. She's suing Madonna, refusing all the other skilled nursing units. The VNA has agreed to do home infusion. "Oh, no – he can't go there. I'm having the house painted."

12.

His seizures began his freshman year. Dilantin trashed his liver. Now he has a working liver, a silent brain, a bowel obstruction. His parents stop the tube feeds. Someone's always at his side, singing, telling family tales, touching him. He passes peacefully.