

Jan. 27, 1982

Dear Dr. Koop,

It's been 1½ years since Mark, our 16 month old, died. I'm writing you because of your involvement in the decision to take Mark off the respirator. The "rightness" of this decision has been weighed in my mind daily. I'm in search of more data to confirm that the decision was correct medically and spiritually. On page 102 of your book The Right to Live; The Right to Die you stated "these decisions are relatively open and shut, as for example in brain death of an individual, perhaps young, who is kept alive by a respirator in the presence of a functioning heart." "Open and shut" - what do you mean? (Has this happened to others? Who? May I correspond with them? I've never heard of another case like Mark's. I'm so alone with my guilt and doubts) But that is exactly what happened to Mark. Please elaborate on it for me.

Mark entered the Carle Clinic in Champaign-Urbana, Ill. on June 3, 1980. with epiglottitis. He stabilized after an E-T tube was put in place and was going to be o.k. But because he wasn't monitored or watched closely enough in the recovery room the tube slipped and he went without oxygen "in excess of 8 minutes." With the passing of time and my Christian experience I have forgiven the staff for those mistakes.

I suffer much guilt over my own mistakes of not getting him to the hospital quickly enough and, reflecting further back, on how he got epiglottitis in the first place.

Even those errors of my own I can reckon with. My main concern is "is it ever correct to remove anyone from a respirator?" Dr. David Hebb, our family physician, has helped and we certainly appreciate the fact that God allowed him and you to be the ones in charge of making this decision for Mark. A non-Christian would have totally devastated me at this point.

Christian ethics is what I'm concerned with. What criteria did you use to come to this conclusion? If it's so "correct", why have I had so much turmoil? I wrestle the issue daily. I'm tempted to speak out against the issue so that others will know the pain and choose not to do it. Yet I'm advised that that isn't responsible either.

If I had it to do all over again, I'd never have chosen the controversial choice. The price has been the ultimate. I understand the inconvenience, the expense, the stress on the family, etc. etc... but I still can't help it.

Modern medicine or not - do we ever have a right / responsibility to disconnect? - no matter what it costs the family. Why mess around with what God might think when you can be sure and not worry about it?

This is where I am. Any in-put you can offer would be appreciated.

I must add that I have been very impressed with your writing ^{and} the greatly respect your opinion. We share the same belief that God is sovereign and life is precious to Him. Please educate me and help me put this issue to rest.

Thank you for your time and help. Mary Ann Taylor of Gibson City has greatly been helped by your book Sometimes Mountains Move. She has shared it in the community and with our Compassionate Friends. Thank you for such inspired writing and the sharing of your own grief.

Sincerely,
Judy Corbin

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