

Case Study: Roman Catholic Doctor and Physician Assisted Death

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A 40-year-old man was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's Disease. He tried all the recommended medications that have been shown to ease symptoms, but nothing has helped. He was devastated to receive this diagnosis and with the progression of the disease, has become increasingly hopeless about his future and the quality of his life. He has decided to explore the option of physician assisted dying. As a Unitarian Universalist, he does not believe in life after death and is not worried about the state of his own soul post death.

He is referred to a new doctor who has helped many patients live with severe genetic diseases. She is Roman Catholic and does not believe in any kind of assisted death.

At their first appointment, the doctor recommends more aggressive treatments that have been proven to be effective when traditional medications have not. One of these treatments is deep-brain stimulation in which electrodes are surgically implanted in the brain and produce electrical impulses to regulate the abnormal impulses created by Parkinson's. After her thorough explanation, the patient shares that he is uninterested in pursuing the treatment. He finds his life too difficult and does not want his family to pay for this kind of procedure. He shares that he wants a physician assisted death.

Following the conversation with the patient and his family, the physician must decide whether to help him with this request, hand him off to another doctor who she knows will help terminate the man's life, or continue to try to convince him to consider other options.

Reflection:

- Discuss the ethical or moral issues at play for the doctor?
- What are the issues at play for the patient?
- How can this doctor support the patient and his family? What other people and/or resources can she draw on?
- What should be considered when the health care provider's religion or belief system is in tension with that of a patient?

Additional Resources:



“Deep Brain Stimulation.” Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 3 Sept. 2021, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/deep-brain-stimulation/about/pac-20384562>.

Traina, Cristina L. “Religious Perspectives on Assisted Suicide.” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (1973-), vol. 88, no. 3, 1998, p. 1147., <https://doi.org/10.2307/3491364>.