

## Case Study: Roman Catholic Organ Donation and End of Life Care

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A 25-year-old male was admitted to the intensive care unit with a serious head injury resulting from a high-speed motor vehicle collision. The patient was stabilized and required mechanical ventilation.

The health care team diagnosed the patient with irreversible brain damage and declared brain dead by the time the patient's parents arrived at the hospital. Both the family and hospital staff expressed extreme grief. The Organ Donation team representative was notified and met the parents in a supportive role. The representative later engaged the family in a discussion about organ donation. The parents are devout Catholics and requested time to discuss as a family how they felt about organ donation.

After the representative excused herself, the patient's mother expressed to the nurse her existential/spiritual concerns for the soul of her son since he had not attended church for years. She also asked his nurse about previous experiences seeing miracles occur since, "God has raised people from the dead," in Biblical accounts.

The family requests to have a Catholic priest come to the bedside to give the patient the "Last Rites."

### Reflection:

- How would you respond to this nurse if you were the nurse manager?
- How can the nurse and interdisciplinary team support the family's religious and spiritual needs during this time?
- How could the nurse appropriately respond to the grieving parent when she asks about "miracles"?
- Would it be appropriate for the nurse to share information about his/her own belief system? Why or why not?
- What are the various ethical, spiritual, and religious needs and concerns at play in cases of brain death and organ donation? Religious Needs at End of Life
- What do the sacraments of the "Last rites" entail? How might the nurse be asked to assist in facilitating this religious need?
- What does Catholic doctrine say anything definitive about end-of-life and organ donation? How might this be the same or different than this family's understanding of their faith?



### Additional Resources:

Balboni, T. A., Paulk, M. E., Balboni, M. J., Phelps, A. C., Loggers, E. T., Wright, A. A., ... & Prigerson, H. G. (2010). Provision of spiritual care to patients with advanced cancer: associations with medical care and quality of life near death. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 28(3), 445.

Handzo, Rev George, and Harold G. Koenig. "Spiritual care: whose job is it anyway?." *Southern Medical Journal* 97.12 (2004): 1242-1245.

Tanenbaum. (2009). *The Medical Manual for Religio-cultural Competence: Caring for Religiously Diverse Populations*. New York: Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.