

March 1, 1982

Mrs. Judy Corbin  
302 Washington  
Farmer City IL 61842

Dear Mrs. Corbin:

I know that you have been through and are going through a very difficult time and I trust that in my effort to be of help to you you will not take what I say amiss. First of all your situation is not unique. It is estimated that about 2% of deaths in hospitals these days are under the same circumstances as Mark's, i.e., where someone has to make a decision about stopping a life support system.

You must understand that because a respirator is putting air in and out of a lung and because the heart is beating does not mean that that patient is alive. There has been much controversy over the years over the definition of "death" but I think most of it is getting straightened out by using the term brain death to mean death of the brain stem (where all the reflexes are) and not just death of the cerebral cortex.

As a Christian I do believe it is utterly wrong for you to have a sense of guilt about the decision that you made about Mark. You claim to believe in the sovereignty of God and to have been led in the direction of action and now you are not sure and assume guilt that does not belong on anyone's shoulders. This guilt of course is additionally misplaced when you blame yourself for not getting Mark to the hospital soon enough, but nevertheless the problems that happened there have nothing to do with the time of his arrival.

To answer your specific question, it is correct to remove a patient from a respirator in a situation that you found yourself with Mark and you must have to shake this guilt which does not belong to a Christian. It is not the least bit unusual for parents to feel this kind of guilt but for a Christian I do believe it is improper. If we trust God's sovereignty in some things, we must trust it in all things. Mark was not disconnected from his life support systems because of inconvenience or expense; he was disconnected because he was in an irreversible situation. It is not even like a Karen Quinlan where without a respirator the brain continues to function and that young lady continues to breathe. I shall pray that the Lord will bring you comfort. I think as soon as you recognize that were God to make ~~it~~ capricious judgment then you would find this terrible wound begin to heal.

Sincerely yours,