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Nutrizione artificiale: aspetti etici

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Artificial nutrition: Ethical aspects

ABSTRACT: The main ethical issue is to establish if and when AN (artificial nutrition within hospital or home environment), should be continued or suspended, referred to the patient for whom it was prescribed. A vast ethical debate is in progress with regards to the obligatory health care measures.

The first argument regards the definition of AN. Some define it as ordinary cure, others believe it is a medical treatment. In the first case, AN would never be subject to a proportionality judgement and would never have to be suspended. In the second case, it would be left to doctors to decide if the treatment is appropriate.

In front of patients who are subject to undergo AN, the following questions must be examined. Must we offer medically assisted nutrition to individuals who most probably will never recover from an unconscious state? Is it permitted in these cases to suspend this form of alimentation? If the eventual suspension of AN leads to the death of a patient is this considered omissive euthanasia"?

"Medically assisted alimentation and hydration cannot be classified halfway between ordinary cure and normal measures. Nevertheless, this type of alimentation and hydration implies an intervention and can in certain cases, become aggravating for the patient. As a consequence of this, it becomes important to examine each case and to assess if this type of alimentation is perceived by the patient as being 'intrusive, painful and repugnant'. If this is the case, there would be no valid reasons or obligation to impose such a burden upon the patient". (Dionigi Tettemanzi). (RINPE 2004; 22: 55-64)

KEY WORDS: Artificial nutrition, Ethic

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