

Withdrawal and Withholding treatment in terminal illness: Islamic Perspective

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Withdrawal and Withholding treatment in terminal illness: Islamic Perspective

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Withholding or withdrawing life support is still an area of controversy. Its applicability is weighed with benefits and risks, and how futile the treatment is for the terminally ill patient.

Unfortunately, many elder patients with chronic illness spend their last few weeks or months in hospitals. Life support is not required if it prolongs the agony and suffering associated with final stages of a terminal illness. When considering end-of-life decision making, both withholding and withdrawing life support are considered to be ethically equivalent. (1)

Issues arising from the withdrawal and withholding treatment have not reached total consensus amongst the Muslim jurists. However, article 63 of the Islamic code of medical ethics

(Code of Conduct 1981) stated that, "the treatment of a patient can be terminated if a team of medical experts or a medical committee involved in the management of such patient are satisfied that the continuation of treatment would be futile or useless." It further stated that "treatment of patients whose condition has been confirmed to be futile by the medical committee should not be commenced." (2,3)

The Permanent Committee for Research and Fatwa, Fatwa (Decree) No. 12086 (1989) is a landmark in regulating resuscitative measures, stopping of machines in cases thought to be not suitable for resuscitative measures. The decision should be based on medical criteria and decided by at least three competent physicians. The family should be approached and the facts discussed fully with them. (4,5)

Mohiuddin et al stated that while the notions of futility greatly impact the bioethical discourse regarding withholding and/or withdrawal of treatment, the conceptualization of futility lacks nuance. The justifying conditions appear to rely on physician assessment of the clinical prognosis. (6)

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