

LETTER to the Editor

Comments on Nutrition and Hydration

I generally agree with the article, "Nutrition and Hydration: The CDF Response, In Perspective," by John J. Hardt and Fr. Kevin D. O'Rourke (*Health Progress*, November-December 2007, pp. 44-47). They raise some appropriate questions about the "Responses," issued by the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in response to questions posed by U.S. bishops. I believe the CDF has underestimated the expense and other burdens brought to the patient and supporting family by long-term administration of nutrition and hydration, thereby offering weakened reasoning. Most of all, I agree strongly with the authors in their objection to the statement by the CDF that the cause of death "will be

neither an illness nor the 'vegetative state' itself, but solely starvation and dehydration."

As a retired professor of students entering medical professions, a part-time hospital chaplain and a medical consultant, I find serious problems with the CDF's statement. Medically, the persistent vegetative state (PVS) is most definitely a serious illness that results in death in a short number of days if no invasive medical procedures (especially hydration) are used to delay death. Given the trauma that initiated the PVS, the medical fact is that it is the first, and certain step, in a natural death. How then can it not be a cause of death? How can the CDF insist that withholding hydration and nutrition is

the sole cause of death, and deny the medical cause?

It would be nice if the CDF could provide a rewrite, and *not only correct the lex dubia* (doubtful law) offered now, but also think of *lex orandi* (law of praying), *lex credendi* (law of believing) and *lex vivendi* (law of living). In Eucharistic Prayer II, the presiding priest proclaims, "Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted, he took bread" (emphasis mine). Jesus did not evade or delay death. Remember, we claim him as the best moral theologian ever!

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