

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the judge's decision and ruled against the Cruzans because under Missouri law, hydration or nutritional support could not be withdrawn from an incompetent patient unless clear evidence demonstrated that this is what the patient would have requested. Several years later, new evidence became known when two of Cruzan's former coworkers came forward. They both stated that she had said she would not wish to be maintained like Karen Quinlan. In December 1990, a judge complied with the Cruzans' wish to have their daughter's feeding tube removed. In reaction to this verdict, right-to-life protestors demonstrated outside the rehabilitation center where Cruzan was being kept alive. The feeding tube was removed on December 14, 1990, and she was pronounced dead 12 days later on December 26, 1990 (*Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Dep't. of Health*, 497 U.S. 261, 1990). In 1996, the Cruzan family went through another tragedy when Nancy's father, Joe Cruzan, hanged himself in the family home. His family and friends believed that he was unable to emotionally recover from his daughter's long, drawn-out death.



Both the Karen Quinlan and the Nancy Cruzan cases are considered to be landmark cases in medical law and ethics because they established an individual's right to refuse to receive medical care. Because both these cases lasted over a period of several years, the cases also illustrated the need for people to let family members know both verbally and particularly in writing what their wishes are for life-sustaining medical care if they become incompetent.

MED TIP

Families often ask for advice from healthcare workers on what course of action they should take for a dying loved one. Remember that the physician is the only healthcare professional who can advise the patients or their families on a course of medical treatment.

Terri Schiavo: "The Face That Moved a Nation"

In October 2003, the face of Terri Schiavo smiling at her mother caught the interest of the U.S. public and the governor of Florida, Jeb Bush. Terri had been in a persistent vegetative state since 1990. Her husband, Michael, and her parents were friendly until a jury awarded \$1 million to Terri, under Michael's control, in a medical malpractice lawsuit. The parents contend that Michael stopped his wife's therapy and used the money to pay lawyer's fees in an attempt to have his wife's feeding tube removed. Terri's husband stated that he wanted to fulfill his wife's wishes that she not be kept living in a comatose or vegetative state. Her parents opposed having the tube removed, declaring that she is not comatose but rather appears to smile, blink, and is able to follow balloons and her parents as they move about her room.

Physicians who examined Terri over the years indicated that she could respond to pain, blink her eyes, and raise her leg when asked to do so. In 2003, a speech pathologist stated that Terri uttered "stop" in response to a medical procedure that was being done to her. One doctor stated that she was not in a "persistent vegetative state," based on the evidence he found when he examined her.

Terri's feeding tube was removed as ordered by the court. There was a great amount of media attention over her case, including a photo of Terri Schiavo smiling up at her mother on the front page of many national newspapers. One week after the feeding tube was removed, Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida legislature ordered that the feeding tube be reinserted. It was. In fact, Terri's feeding tube was removed and reinserted three times before the final removal. She died 13 days after the feeding tube was removed, which was 15 years after her collapse at the age of 26, and seven years after her court battle began.