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Instructions: Choose one of the 2 case studies below to read and answer the corresponding reflection questions for that scenario. Submit to my dropbox and be prepared to discuss your responses in class.

Case 1 – Is it Okay to Change Your Mind?

A 90-year-old female, Mrs. Ruth, is admitted to hospital from home after sustaining a hip fracture. She has a history of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease on home oxygen and moderate to severe aortic stenosis. She undergoes urgent hemiarthroplasty (hip surgery) with an uneventful operative course.

Unfortunately, on postoperative day 4, the patient develops delirium with respiratory failure secondary to hospital acquired pneumonia and pulmonary edema. Her goals of care were not assessed pre-operatively. She is admitted to the ICU for non-invasive positive pressure ventilation for 48 hours, and then deteriorates and is intubated. After 48 hours of ventilation, it was determined that due to the severity of her underlying cardio-pulmonary status (COPD and aortic stenosis), ventilator weaning would be difficult and further ventilation would be futile.

The patient's daughter is insistent on continuing all forms of life support, including mechanical ventilation and even extracorporeal membranous oxygenation (ECMO) if indicated. However, Mrs. Ruth's delirium clears within the next 24 hours of intubation, and she is now competent, although still mechanically ventilated. She communicated to the ICU team that she preferred 1-way extubation (removal of the ventilator) and comfort care. This was communicated in writing to the ICU team and was consistent over time with other care providers. The patient went as far to demand the extubation over the next hour, which was felt to be reasonable by the ICU team.

The patient's daughter was informed of this decision and stated that she could not come to the hospital for 2 hours, and in the meantime, that the patient must remain intubated. At this point, the ICU team concurred with the patient's wishes, and extubated her before her daughter was able to come to the hospital.

The daughter was angry at the team's decision and requested that the patient be re-intubated if she deteriorated. When the daughter arrived at the hospital, the patient and daughter were able to converse, and the patient then agreed to re-intubation if she deteriorated.

1. Who do you think should make decisions in this situation? Should the ICU team have extubated the patient?

-The patient should make the decision when she is competent. The daughter should make the decision when the patient is not competent.

-The ICU should have intubated the patient because respiratory failure was a complication of the surgery.

2. Do you think the patient should be allowed to change her mind?

-Yes.

3. Does the change in the patient's decision mean that she lacked the capacity to make the decision in the first place, or that she was not well informed?

-No, she didn't make a statement saying she didn't understand.

4. The patient's goals of care were not assessed preoperatively. When do you think would have been the ideal time to have that conversation with the patient?

-Anytime before the procedure and before anesthesia (i.e. when obtaining consent).