

Relief

Category: Scars

written by Anne Leitten | April 20, 2024

When Mike had been sedated for a few days, I talked with his wife Sue, who shared that Mike would not have wanted to linger like this. Before being sedated, he told her that he hoped to pass within a day or two. It was troubling to Sue that he was lingering like this.

I left their room and went to talk with the team. I was wondering if people's tracheostomy tubes were ever removed, understanding it might hasten death. We ordered an ethics consult, and we all decided that removing a trach was permissible, similar to removing other forms of ventilatory support.

The team talked with Sue about this option, and she wanted some time to think about it. The next day, she decided it would be in-line with his desire to not prolong life further. We made plans to remove his trach the next morning. This felt SO HEAVY to me. I knew it would honor Mike's wishes, yet the thought of shortening his life bothered me. I was having trouble sleeping, worrying about him having a potential catastrophic bleed or something equally as traumatic for him and his family.

I was driving to work the morning of his planned trach removal when I got a message that Mike had just died. I physically felt like a weight had been lifted from me. Although I was sad to learn of his passing, the more prominent emotion for me was relief: that his passing was peaceful; that his wife was with him; and, honestly, that it happened before the trach removal.

I talked with Sue later that day, and she shared that she had told Mike that they were going to remove his trach, and if that wasn't how he wanted his life to end, he needed to "do something different" before then. She woke up inexplicably around 5:30 a.m. and couldn't go back to sleep, which was unusual for her.

She climbed into bed with Mike. This was a luxury for them, with him being in the hospital. They hadn't been in the same bed together in over a year since he was sleeping in a recliner at home due to his tumor.

Sue rested her head on Mike's shoulder, put her hand on his chest, and lay with him. She felt him peacefully take his last breath less than an hour later.

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