

Knowing When to Let Go

Category: Getting the News

written by Deb Skolnik | January 2, 2017

I will never forget being told that my mother's treatment options were pretty much over. A COPD/atrial fibrillation sufferer, she had been intubated and spent time in the ICU, then rehab and then home for a few days. She was very vehement about not wanting to spend life on a ventilator. And she documented this in a living will.

I got a phone call from the ICU doctors saying they wanted to talk to me and my brother. When we got there, the doctor compassionately told us that the BIPAP (breathing mask) they had been trying for a day or so wasn't helping, and that the only thing left was what my mother didn't want, being put back on the ventilator.

Because we knew what she wanted, and how important quality of life was to her, we had little problem telling the doctor to only provide comfort care. My mother knew, even better than most, about quality of life from spending years caring for my father, who had Parkinson's disease. She dreaded a similar loss of control for herself.

She was moved to a regular hospital room later that day, and died in the early hours of the next morning. We had time to say goodbye and to let her know we were honoring her wishes.

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