



# Ethics Challenge 2013/2014

## The case

A granddaughter writes: "My grandmother, Joan, has always been energetic, prickly, self reliant. As a girl she loved swimming, cycling, flirting, arguing, dancing, moving. After being widowed in her early 70s she read, travelled, bought herself baubles and may or may not have enjoyed a love affair. She was one of the most active people I have encountered. And now, at 92, I would like her to die. Even those who do not remember Joan's fierce individualism would pity the condition in which she now finds herself: tortured into living by a medical system that will not let her go. My grandmother is clearly dying, trapped in some pained transitional state. Her face and body have taken on a skeletal appearance. She sleeps most of the time. When awake, her eyes have a lost look within her stilled body, as if in appeal. She cannot hear and increasingly refuses to eat or drink. She is ready.

The medical services, however, are not, and are engaged in an aggressive battle to resurrect her. The individual they are fighting would appear to be my grandmother herself. Joan has always expressed a desire to die at home, and was paying hundreds of Euro

a month painstakingly saved for the privilege, nourished by those who love her in surroundings in which she felt secure. This summer she was removed from the home she has occupied since 1940 by a district nurse coup (against her wishes, those of her family and GP) and is now on a disorienting, stifling and noisy geriatric ward. Elements of dementia have increased with the confusion. We were told she would be admitted for a maximum of 48 hours. Yesterday, she saw in her fifth week. Benevolent as her immediate nursing staff are, this hijack is one of the most grotesque things I have witnessed – not merely inhumane, but inhuman. The situation I am proposing is fundamental. It involves not killing people but letting them die with dignity in conditions of their choosing".

## Questions for consideration

1. What are the ethical issues that arise in this case?
2. Do any legal considerations need to be taken into account?
3. How do you believe death with dignity should be defined?

**This is the fifth instalment of the RCSIsmj Ethics Challenge. The editorial staff would like to congratulate Diarmuid O'Brien on his winning essay in the 2012/2013 Ethics Challenge. Please see page 7 for his submission.**

We invite all students to submit an essay discussing the ethical questions raised in the case presented. Medical ethics is an essential aspect of the medical curriculum and we hope to encourage RCSI students to think critically about ethical situations that arise during their education and subsequent careers.

All essays will be reviewed by a faculty panel of experts and the winning essay will be published in the 2014 print edition of the *RCSIsmj*.

The deadline for submission of entries will be the same as the general submission deadline for the 2014 edition of the *RCSIsmj*. Please visit our website at [www.rcsismj.com](http://www.rcsismj.com) for specific dates. Please contact us at [editorsmj@rcsi.ie](mailto:editorsmj@rcsi.ie) with any questions or concerns.

## Submission guidelines

Please construct a lucid, structured and well-presented discourse for the issues raised by this case. Please ensure that you have addressed all the questions highlighted and discuss these ethical issues academically, making sure to reference when necessary.

Your paper should not exceed 2,000 words.

Your essay will be evaluated on three major criteria:

1. Ability to identify the ethical issues raised by the case.
2. Fluency of your arguments.
3. Academic quality with regard to depth of research, appropriateness of references and quality of sources.

Good luck!