



Latest Research Results:

Flawed Informed Consent for Most Feeding Tube Insertions

A new study in this month's issue of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (May 2011) examines the process for how physicians decide with families about feeding tube insertion for patients with advanced dementia. The researchers used a mortality follow-back survey in which they interviewed the next-of-kin listed on the death certificate for patients who died from dementia.

Major findings:

- Only 10.8% of demented patients had a feeding tube inserted compared to one-third almost a decade ago.
- There was limited, if any, informed consent prior to feeding tube insertion. Of those patients who had a feeding tube inserted, in 13.7% the feeding tube was inserted **without** discussion with the patient's legal agent. In an additional 42%, the discussion with the patient's legal agent lasted 15 minutes or less. In only half the cases were the risks of a feeding tube explained, and in only 23% of cases was the option of careful hand feeding instead of insertion of a feeding tube presented.
- Patients who had feeding tubes inserted were much more likely to have physicians who strongly favored their insertion (38.2% vs 1.4% in those who did not have a feeding tube inserted).
- There was tremendous variation from state to state in feeding tube insertion. Patients were ten times more likely to have had a feeding tube inserted in Texas than they were in Massachusetts or Minnesota.
- In only a third of patients did the family report that the patient's quality of life was improved by the feeding tube. A higher percentage of families (40%) reported the patient was bothered by the feeding tube and in 35% of the cases the patients were restrained physically or by medication to prevent them from pulling out the feeding tube.

The authors conclude that the process of communication for making decisions about insertion of feeding tubes falls far short of the goal of shared-decision making.

Reference: Teno JM, *et al.* Decision-making and outcomes of feeding tube insertion: A five-state study. *JAGS* 2011;59:881-886.

Please see the Center's website, http://www.wvendoflife.org/MediaLibraries/WVCEOLC/Media/laws/tube-feeding_2011.pdf for an annotated bibliography on the use of feeding tubes in patients with advanced dementia and stroke.

www.wvendoflife.org

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