

Defining the Line between Letting Go and Neglect

I thank Dr. Ezzat Abouleish for his editorial regarding end-of-life care entitled *When My Time Comes, Please Let Me Go*.¹ As a physician myself, I can appreciate the idea that modern medicine has at times gone too far to artificially extend the lives of some without due consideration for the quality of those lives. However, I have watched my husband slowly succumb to the discomforts and indignities of Parkinson's disease over the past 10 years and have served as his primary caregiver. I must offer my experience, which I think presents some practical difficulties for how to actually act on the good points that Dr. Abouleish raised.

Practically speaking, it is very difficult to ever make a decision based on what Dr. Abouleish has written. My husband's decline has been extremely gradual. When a decline occurs so gradually, one cannot simply look at a checklist and say that since a person cannot do a, b, and c, 'I will simply stop helping him.'

Dr. Abouleish's article has raised a lot of questions in my mind. Even the most basic daily respon-

sibilities of upkeep have become a physical and emotional burden for me, and I know for him as well, as much as it pains me to admit it. Am I prolonging his life beyond the point that it is beneficial to him? It would be easy to say that I might refuse a strenuous operation or a feeding tube or some other drastic intervention that would artificially prolong his life. But how can I not maintain his health the best I can with daily life activities such as bathing, clothing, and feeding? And how can I refuse to give him his diabetic and other medications on which he has come to depend?

In short, where does one draw the line between "letting someone go" and neglecting him?

Name withheld by editor

Reference

1. Abouleish EI. When my time comes, please let me go. *J Islam Med Assoc.* 2010;42:7-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5915/42-1-5159>