

Investigation

3.14B: Circle of Life

Even as medical research continues to provide new opportunities such as CRISPRs for the treatment of the genetic and infective diseases that plague mankind, the Circle of Life, we do not believe will ever disappear. Death appears inevitable for all living things.

One of the most difficult duties you will have as a physician involves counseling the terminally ill and their families about end of life decisions. When a patient is suffering from extreme difficulty even breathing, and having diffuse pain with no reasonable expectation of improvement, the family looks to you for direction on what to do. Some families desire that life be continued as long as possible, while others feel that without some quality of life, life itself may no longer be worthwhile.

Medical Directives are a tool for facilitating the process of determining the degree of medical care desired by the patient himself or herself in those difficult times when end of life decisions become pertinent. Some assert their desire that no heroic measures, such as surgery or artificial ventilation, be taken to continue their life when little chance exists for restoration of a normal life.

Dr. Hill's was recently forced to decide the fate of their pet cat, Rudy. Rudy was a happy, active cat for almost thirteen years. Then, suddenly one day, he stopped eating, playing, and socializing; instead he went outside on the deck and stared outward, apparently knowing his life was about to end. We took Rudy to the Vet, who took a history, a blood test, and x-rays. Without doing extensive, expensive testing, she strongly suspected that Rudy had cancer of the liver, and would not get better. Sentenced to days of pain and suffering, she advised that we consider **euthanasia** for Rudy.

We took Rudy home, along with pain relieving medicine, so that our children and grandchildren could say goodbye. Rudy became a lesson for our grandchildren on the true Circle of Life; everyone cried and wished Rudy a pleasant journey to Kitty Heaven.

The next day we returned to the veterinary clinic, where we experienced a most compassionate and peaceful end to Rudy's life. As Rudy labored to breathe, the Vet gave Rudy a sedative that allowed him to fall asleep as we stroked his fur and spoke peacefully to him. After he was totally unconscious, the Vet gave the final injection, and within a minute confirmed that Rudy was no longer of this life.

We hope that one-day, most, if not all humans can end their lives in peaceful slumber, such as Rudy did. Unfortunately we cannot always choose the time and place where our lives end; even having the ability to alter genes does not protect us from tragedies. Therefore, we should strive to live each day as though it could be our last. Do something you are proud of each day! Offer help to someone in need; treat others with respect. Make your world a kinder, gentler world. Practice the art of compassion; you will find it very useful in your life whether or not you choose a career in medicine.