**Case Study: Bill and Nora**

**Advance directives and patients with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias**

For the past year, Bill Harris has been trying to help his wife die. The 75-year-old retired tech worker says it’s his duty to Nora Harris, his spouse of nearly four decades, who was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease eight years prior in 2009.

Nora, 64, a former librarian, signed an advance directive after her diagnosis to prevent her life from being prolonged when her disease got worse. Now, her husband says, the disease *has* progressed and Nora is being kept alive because nursing staff are offering Nora food and drink, which she accepts, against her previously stated wishes.

Although Bill petitioned the local court to order the feedings stopped, the judge ruled against Bill’s request last summer, concluding that state laws against elder abuse in nursing facilities mandates that Nora continue to receive food and fluids if she is willing to accept them.Bill argues that the advance directive, which he, Nora’s children, and two close friends have also affirmed, should override this law. “Nora did not want to be in a position where somebody had to totally take care of her,” Bill said. “When nature, through the disease, basically said, ‘I can’t feed myself,’ Nora’s position was, that’s it. Let nature take its course.”

In recent weeks, Nora Harris has been gaining weight, climbing from less than 100 pounds to 102 or 103 — just enough to keep her stable. Bill Harris learned that, in addition to three state-required daily meals, staffers have been feeding Nora optional snacks, too.

Now Bill is considering going back to court to try to stop the snacks in an effort to let Nora Harris lose enough weight to end her life. Twice before, in 2015 and 2016, she fell to 90 pounds and was enrolled in hospice, with six months or less to live, only to rebound, he said, when staffers coaxed her to eat.“You’re denying Nora the right to die on her terms,” Bill Harris said. “It’s not a right-to-life issue, it’s a right-to-die issue.” He continued, “That court decision basically condemned Nora to the full extent of the Alzheimer’s disease.”

Nora’s court-appointed lawyer, who represented Nora against Bill’s request, argued that her directive doesn’t *specifically* mention food and drink presented by hand. Because she now opens her mouth and swallows when food is offered, Nora has, in essence, changed her mind, the lawyer stated in a court document. Bill Harris said that opening her mouth is a reflex, an automatic response to six decades of habit.

**Your decision:** Should the court rule in favor of Bill’s request for the facility staff members to stop feeding Nora snacks in hopes of her losing enough weight to enroll again in hospice and, hopefully, be able to finally embark on the refusal or food and fluids Nora stated she wanted in her advance directive over eight years ago?

Using the appeals—especially legal/professional, autonomy, consequences, and special considerations—make your considered decision.

\*This is a real case based in Oregon. Ask me for the outcome after your analyses.