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Food, water equated with medical treatment

AP — Administering food and water to an irrevocably unresponsive patient is medical treatment, according to a neurologist and medical ethicist who testified in a precedent-setting right-to-die suit that opened last week in Carthage, Mo.

Dr. Ronald Cranford testified on behalf of Joe and Joyce Cruzan. The Carterville, Mo., couple has sued the state to force doctors at the State Rehabilitation Center in Mount Vernon to remove a surgically implanted feeding tube from the stomach of their daughter, Nancy, and allow her to die.

State attorneys argue that food and water are basic necessities of life that should not be denied to anyone.

According to testimony Wednesday, Nancy Cruzan, 30, was deprived of oxygen for several minutes after an automobile accident in 1983. Cranford, who testified for nearly four hours Monday before Jasper County Judge Charles Teel, described her condition as a "persistent vegetative state" from which she will not recover.

"The patient is awake . . . but there's no consciousness, no interaction with the environment," he said.

"There's no thinking, no feeling, no ability to experience pain and suffering."

Cranford said paramedics who responded to Cruzan's accident were able to revive her heart and lungs thanks to advanced medical technology, but her brain will never recover.

"We're seeing more and more of these patients," he said. "This is a product of our success, not our failure in medicine."

Cranford of Minneapolis chairs the ethics committee of the American Society of Neurologists and has contributed to national forums on medical ethics, including a presidential commission convened in 1980.

Cranford testified that he has withdrawn food and water from patients in conditions similar to Nancy Cruzan's and believes such a decision falls into the legal and ethical territory that allows suspension of respirators.

William Colby, a Kansas City attorney representing the Cruzans' parents, said in his opening arguments that Nancy Cruzan's right to privacy pro-

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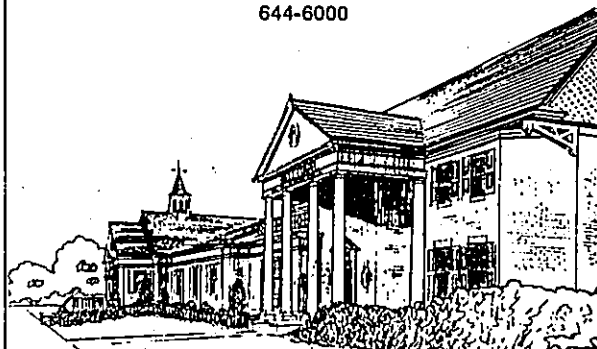
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