

Quadriplegic wants life-support system off



David Rivlin wants to be unhooked from the ventilator that has kept him alive for almost three years.

'I'm just tired of being hooked up. It's artificial'

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Rivlin went back to school at Wayne State University and Oakland University, but his health failed him and he had to quit.

Rivlin said he knows this is the end of the line. "I won't get better. This is the flabcock." And he's tired of having no future. "I'm just tired of being hooked up. It's artificial. I've hated it from the beginning. I've tried to live with it. But I can't."

RIVLIN SPENDS his days watching television, listening to the radio and to talking books. He rarely gets out of bed and into his wheelchair anymore. His parents are dead. And friends and acquaintances are few.

"People are uncomfortable with the ventilator — people on the outside," he said.

Though his mind is made up, Rivlin admits he's frightened. "I wouldn't be human if I wasn't. But I'm more scared about being in an institution for the next 20 years," he said.

He's faced his situation, but Rivlin said he's angry. He had so many plans. He wanted to get married, have children, work hard at a career and have a life like anyone else. "I'm angry when I realize what I've lost. I don't see any reason to continue with an empty shell of an existence," Rivlin said.

His aunt, Marion Gornbein-Mellon in Palm Harbor, Fla., supports Riv-

lin's decision. "He has absolutely nothing to live for. He realizes he will never have a family. He lies there with his eyes covered so he doesn't stare at the ceiling," she said.

"He says, 'I want to die while I still have my sanity. I want to die while I still have that.' I can't honestly say, 'David, you are wrong.' You can't tell him that as he lies there. I can't help but go along with his wishes," Gornbein-Mellon said.

BUT THERE are plenty who don't share his aunt's feelings. The media attention greeting Rivlin's decision has brought a lot of calls to the room Rivlin shares with two other nursing home residents.

"I'm comfortable with my decision. It's other people who are having trouble with it," he said.

Rivlin is referring to people he doesn't know. People "who don't have a stake in this" feel quite free calling him to give him their opinion about his decision.

"There are a lot of weird people out there who are giving me some strange advice. This whole thing has become a circus. Some people want to heal me. But I haven't agreed to see them. Some don't want me to do it. But they have all been supportive."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Patient optimistic that court will grant his request

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Rivlin is pretty optimistic he'll get his way. "We have not been contacted by anyone thus far," said Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson, who has no plans to oppose Rivlin's request.

With the prospect of continued total immobility — except being able to turn his head — and the constant hiss of the companion ventilator, Rivlin wants out. While medical technology is keeping him breathing, it can't solve his problems.

"It would take a complete trans-

plant of a spinal cord to recover. And that's not possible at this time in medicine," he said.

But Rivlin is not dying. In fact, he's in medically stable condition and likely to remain so for at least another 20 years. That's why the current right-to-die bill for terminally ill and injured patients now before the state Legislature would not apply to him even if it were passed immediately.

"IT DOESN'T fit him. Mentally, he's not going to deteriorate. He's in stable condition," said Rivlin's De-

troit attorney, David Rosin. "But he can't use anything. A psychiatrist examined Rivlin and found him competent and rational, Rosin added.

The attorney said he can't predict the outcome of Rivlin's request. "This is what he wants to do. He's got more brains than the average person. He feels no use to society. He feels no use to himself. His dignity is affected every moment."

At one time, Rivlin had hoped to live independently. But each time an attendant left, he'd be forced back into an institution, which the state

pays \$230 a day, more than the \$207 a day he would get if he lived on his own.

Even if Rivlin gets his wish and is disconnected from the ventilator, it's uncertain he will die. Legally, his Farmington Hills physician, Dr. Ed Blumberg, owner of the Care Centers of Michigan, cannot honor Rivlin's request without court permission.

Rivlin believes legislation allowing people to die when they wish is long overdue. Though he's going through the legal steps to have his

ventilator disconnected, he feels the proceedings are unnecessary.

"A PERSON, I believe, has the right to say they want artificial means disconnected. This is necessary in Michigan. But I think I should have the right without going to court for it."

Deciding when it's time to die, Rivlin said, is a personal decision. "Each person should make this decision. You shouldn't be dictated by the medical or judicial institutions when it comes to our existence," he said.

But it's not that easy. Rivlin's is the third right-to-die request in Oak-

land County in the last two years. In 1987, Farmington Hills resident Clifford Culham was granted his request for his physician to disconnect him from life-support systems. Culham was suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease.

Last November, the parents of 12-year-old Joelle Rosebush of Lapeer successfully battled the county prosecutor's office to have life-support equipment turned off. This case has since been appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court to define law for future cases.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Board hopefuls tackle issues at forum

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ALTHOUGH THEY agreed on a number of issues, each candidate is touting individual platforms for this election.

Ranney suggests improving the school district through "openness and honesty," and better planning and a uniform curriculum for the district. He also suggests opening the School/Community Forum up to

more parents.

"Fiscal responsibility" is Akouri's cry. "It's time for a change," he said. "If I don't make it this year, I will come back..."

Disbary went on the offensive Monday, offering current figures on testing in the district and challenging what she said were incorrect assumptions of low test scores offered by the challengers. She said she wanted to serve for another term, offering an extensive education

background as her forte.

In an interview with the Observer, Ditzhazy said if she won in June this would be her last term.

Cotton said new school programs and reorganization of the district during his first term were proof of positive changes made by the current board. "I offer no apologies for this wonderful school district," he said. "It is a district of growth. It will meet the challenges and be a district for the '90s."

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