AS A PATIENT, IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO FORGO LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT?

**Is the treatment certain to be life saving?**
(i.e. the effectiveness of the treatment is certain or highly probable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yes</th>
<th>It is <strong>impermissible</strong> to forgo medical care*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>It is <strong>permissible</strong> to forgo medical care (including a ventilator)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What is "life saving" in the context of COVID-19?**
There is currently no curative treatment for patients with COVID-19

More severe cases will need to be admitted to the hospital and sometimes even to the ICU

Once someone needs a ventilator the prognosis is generally poor. Current data from several countries shows very high mortality rates.

Life-sustaining treatments provided for severe COVID-19 cases are thus **uncertain** to save a life. It is therefore permissible - in most cases - to forgo these treatments if a patient chooses to do so.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The moral status of seeking medical care in Islam**

“The dominant position in the Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali schools is that seeking medical treatment is **permissible but not obligatory**, while Shafi'i jurists hold seeking medical treatment to be a recommended act. (...) The moral status elevation from a permitted or recommended act to a moral obligation appears to hinge on the *certainty* regarding a fatal outcome without treatment and/or certainty about the clinical efficacy of treatment in removing harm associated with the illness.” (A. I. Padela and O. Qureshi (2017) *Islamic perspectives on clinical intervention near the end-of-life: We can but must we?* Med Health Care and Philos, 20; 545-559.)

Seeking a specific treatment is therefore only obligatory when it is *life saving* and not merely *life-sustaining*. While treatments might *save a life*, there may be *no clinical certainty* that they will. As a result, it is generally permissible to forgo life-sustaining treatments such as ventilators. Such decisions should be made in consultation with the medical team, family members, and religious authorities.

*note that within the Hanbali school it remains permissible to withhold care even when a clinical cure is certain*
AS A PATIENT OR FAMILY MEMBER, IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO WITHDRAW LIFE SUSTAINING TREATMENT?

1. Are the chances of recovery to a conscious state probable (>50%)?
   (i.e. there is a clear outcome benefit)
   - yes: Treatment should most likely be continued (see 2. for additional considerations)
   - no: It is permissible to withdraw care (including a ventilator)

2. Do the treatment harms outweigh the benefits?
   (i.e. how do the medical treatment benefits compare to their associated violations of human dignity?)
   - yes: Treatment should most likely be continued (see background information for additional considerations)
   - no: It is permissible to withdraw care (including a ventilator)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Dignity and involatility of human beings

“There are important theological concepts that can be used to support moral arguments for forgoing clinical interventions near the end-of-life: karamah (dignity) and hurmah (inviolability). (...) [they] give pause to the disruption of bodily integrity and alteration of its appearance. Many types of clinical interventions, by their nature, intrude upon bodily integrity (...) hence decisions about courses of medical care, particularly near the end-of-life, must balance the posited benefits attached to clinical procedures against the threats to karamah and hurmah via the violation of bodily integrity. (...) Harkening back to our discussion about the limited conditions under which clinical intervention is morally obligated by Islam, the theological constructs of karamah and hurmah provide further support for ethically-justifiable non-intervention where interventions have marginal utility and cause great disruption to the body.” A. I. Padela and O. Qureshi (2017) Islamic perspective on clinical intervention near the end-of-life: We can but must we? Med Health Care and Philos, 20; 545-559.
USEFUL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR END-OF-LIFE DECISION MAKING

ACADEMIC PAPERS

1. A. I. Padela and O. Qureshi (2017) *Islamic perspective on clinical intervention near the end-of-life: We can but must we?* Med Health Care and Philos, 20; 545-559


VIDEOS

- Framing Palliative Care: Islamic Bioethical Constructions for Meeting a Good Death
- Ethical Obligations & Goals of Care at the End-of-Life
- Palliative & End-of-Life Care for Muslims

FATWAS

- Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America
- European Council for Fatawa Research

PUBLIC ARTICLES

- Maryam Sultan - *Pulling the Plug: The Islamic Perspectives on End-of-Life Care* (Yaqeen Institute)
- Usman Baqai - *A Dignified Farewell: Is there an Islamic paradigm for end-of-life care decisions?* (Islamic Horizons)

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