

Module 7 Case Study

Mary is 35 years old and lives with her husband Tom and their three children, twins William and Charlie (aged 10) and daughter Emily (aged 5). Mary's parents John and Diane live in the same community and they are a close-knit family. Mary is a high school science teacher. About 6 months ago Mary was diagnosed with Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM). She was diagnosed after months of headaches and a seizure. Her headaches were so severe, she was unable to perform the normal activities of daily living and went on sick leave. Since her diagnosis she has been steadily declining; experiencing symptoms like nausea and vomiting, weakness and numbness, and, recently, cognitive changes.

The average survival time for patients with GBM is devastatingly short – about 12-18 months. Only 25% of GBM patients survive more than a year, and a mere 5% of patients survive more than five years.

Mary has undergone all therapies proposed by her oncologist. Currently, Mary is unconscious and undergoing cerebrospinal fluid shunting on a regular basis as her condition continues to worsen. Due to her current state, she is unable to make decisions for herself.

Mary's oncologist, Dr. Cho, has suggested withdrawing life-sustaining treatment and has also recommended changing Mary's code status to AND.

Mary's husband, Tom, is devastated. He tells the team to please continue to try to do everything they can to help Mary. Although he is not a particularly religious man, he shares that he has been praying for positive change. He also claims that this is what Mary would want.

Mary's health care team finds the situation morally distressing, and are concerned about how to proceed.