

MNFL FALL CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Over 50 nurses, lay people and students met on October 7th at the Franco Auditorium of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Pontiac to hear speakers related to the topic “End of Life Decisions: Who Will Make Yours?”

Nancy Valko RN, the spokesperson for the National Association of Pro-life Nurses and an Advanced Legal Nurse Consultant, shared stories of her work with intensive care unit patients who were thought to have no hope of survival, but “woke up” after supportive care was offered. She told of her third daughter who was born with Down syndrome and a heart defect; she died at 5 1/2 months old and the doctor who encouraged her to “let her daughter die” eventually became pro-life.

She cared for an elderly man who coded after a knee replacement and refused to give him morphine when he was taken off the vent; she was almost terminating for exercising her conscience rights as a nurse.

Another daughter abused drugs and became pregnant at age 17; she released the baby for adoption, returned to drugs and became pregnant again. She miscarried this baby and became suicidal. She read “Final Exit” and ended her life in 2009. Nancy commented how depressed people often look for options to get out of painful situations. Nancy gave a strong pro-life witness as she shared these difficult situations.

Jason Negri, JD, the Assistant Director of the Patient’s Rights Council, spoke on the practical and ethical issues related to end of life care. He spoke of the differences between wills, financial and medical powers of attorney and advanced directives.

Living wills are very broad, don’t cover all potential medical situations and currently are not legal in Michigan. Advanced directives allow the patient to choose an agent to represent his/her health care wishes. POST – Physician’s orders for scope of treatment is not yet legal in Michigan; this document needs to be continually updated based on the patient’s current health situation. POST legislation has passed the Michigan House, needs to go through the Senate and may become law next year. He said POST documents could be “living wills on steroids”. RTL of Michigan is working to make POST documents as supportive of the pro-life position as possible.

He spoke of society’s general attitude to “pull the plug”; our society values youth and is uncomfortable with death. He stressed it is always possible to remove “burdensome methods of care” that are not helping, weighing the benefits and risks to the patient. Five states currently allow assisted suicide: (OR, WA, VT, CA, and. CO)-. Twenty eight bills have been introduced in other states.

Much information was gleaned from both speakers; we will continue to face moral and ethical challenges as pro-life nurses.

Mary Lou Temple, RN, MSN
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