

Reg – Case Study

Background

Reg is a 74 year-old man with late stage dementia, living in a residential dementia unit. His Enduring Power of Attorney is his wife, Marg. He is mobile, can bathe and dress with prompting, and eats independently. He has limited ability to express himself verbally. He used to walk around the unit most of the day, seemingly content. Recently he has started to lose weight, has become more fatigued. A locum GP ordered blood tests, which indicated anaemia. On obtaining the blood results the locum GP rang the Registered Nurse and asked her to ask the family if they wanted Reg sent to hospital for investigations. This she did, and Reg's wife said, "yes of course!" ED found nothing acute, and suggested the GP refer him for outpatient investigations. In ED Reg had had to be sedated as he was very distressed.

Current situation

The next day, Marg and her son Paul came into the unit demanding to speak with whoever is in charge, as they wanted Reg sent back to hospital. His condition was stable and he was undistressed.

- They wanted a diagnosis, even if it meant distress for Reg and no change in outcome.
- The Registered Nurse had heard staff saying previously that Reg had said on several occasions that he does not want to live like this and he doesn't want to "end up like those in there" [hospital level dementia unit]. The Registered Nurse could find no documentation to this effect.
- The nurse attempted to discuss with Reg to no avail.

Issues for discussion

1. Do the family have a right to demand that Reg be transferred back to hospital?
2. Would going back to hospital at this time likely be in Reg's best interests?
3. How would you approach the next part of the conversation with Marg and Paul?
4. What might have made this situation easier?