

[Pope Comments on Tube Feeding and Hydration: Raises Concerns](#)

Ethics & Law

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([The Chicago Sun-Times](#)) - On March 20, 2004 Pope John Paul clarified the teaching of the Catholic Church on artificial hydration and nutrition (ANH) causing an uproar among caregivers, healthcare systems, and medical ethicists.

The position of the Church now is that ANH is not a medical treatment, per se, and is therefore mandatory. Previously, there was a fairly large divide among Catholic theologians. There were two basic positions prior to this statement: The one that the Pope has enunciated, and one that sought to make decisions based on weight of benefit vs burden to the patient [LifeSite.net](#). The Pope's statement addresses especially those in Persistent Vegetative States (PVS).

ElderHope finds itself in agreement with the position that seeks to weigh the benefits vs. burden to patients. To be quite clear, we do believe that all of life is sacred, even the last hours of life. We would define ourselves as opposed to euthanasia. Indeed, we would define ourselves as pro-life. We do not see the withdrawal of ANH as euthanasia in cases of terminal illness.

The Pope's statement is a mystery to us. We understand his pro-life stance, and we support it. We cannot, however, imagine the Vatican adopting a position that deepens the sufferings of patients who receive such care. We cannot see how he arrives at his conclusion that ANH is not a treatment (the primary rationale for his position): It requires hospitalization, maintenance, and constant monitoring. In terms of suffering, ANH promotes infection, and creates increased episodes of aspiration (choking). The Church certainly has the responsibility to weigh in on issues such as this. It should, however, be aware of the medical nuances that impinge on this topic, and show evidence that it has more carefully taken those nuances into account. Moreover, it should not find itself in collusion with those who prolong life as a sort of avoidance of death. Such a position is hardly Christian.

Some Resources:

[Chicago Sun-Times article](#)

[LifeSite.net article](#)

[Arizona Republic article \(registration required\)](#)

[The Pope's Statement \(in Italian\)](#)

[Development of Church Teaching on Prolonging Life by Kevin D. O'Rourke, O.P., J.C.D.](#)