

This commentary was sent to media sources nationwide on Jan. 25, 2005

## Legal Fight over Feeding Tube Points to Need for Living Wills, Duke Expert Says

The bitter dispute over a Florida law created to keep a brain-damaged woman hooked to a feeding tube underscores the need for families and individuals to consider preparing living wills and advance directives, said Jeanne Twohig, deputy director of the Duke Institute on Care at the End of Life.

In 2004, the Florida Supreme Court ruled that “Terri's Law,” which had been enacted to keep Terri Schiavo alive, was unconstitutional. On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to overrule the Florida Supreme Court decision.

The decision by the lower court allows Terri Schiavo’s feeding tube to be removed. Her husband, Michael Schiavo, has said Mrs. Schiavo did not want to be kept alive artificially. Mrs. Schiavo’s parents have disagreed, telling the court that Michael Schiavo is attempting to hasten her death so he may inherit her estate and remarry.

“This heart-wrenching situation reminds us all of the importance of formally making known our wishes regarding our own care,” Twohig said. “Such decisions should not be left to grieving loved ones who might have irreconcilable differences of opinion.”

The Institute on Care at the End of Life, based at Duke Divinity School, works to improve research, education and practice in the care of those near life's end. Activities include academic research and teaching; practical training for health-care providers, pastors and other caregivers; and providing information and educational programs for the wider public.