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Mr. Jackson was a 64-year-old man with advanced dementia and newly diagnosed cancer of the head and neck. He was brought to the emergency room from his board and care facility with a history of not tolerating oral feeding. Mr. Jackson had a large mass at the base of his tongue, which was determined to be cancer. Further evaluation revealed spread of the tumor to his lymph nodes, rendering it incurable. He was not a candidate for chemotherapy, radiation, or surgical intervention.

Prior to the cancer diagnosis, Mr. Jackson's only major medical problem was advanced dementia. In the years following an initial stroke, he suffered a series of infarcts and had become mostly noncommunicative. His family, including a daughter Joan and son Rick, believed he no longer recognized them. They did note that he seemed to enjoy their visits, smiling and responding positively to human touch and conversation. Since the obstructing mass prevented Mr. Jackson from eating or drinking safely, a decision regarding feeding tube placement was required.

Although Mr. Jackson had formally named both children as Durable Powers of Attorney for Healthcare, he had not completed a Living Will or specifically discussed treatment preferences with them. However, Joan and Rick said that following Mr. Jackson's first stroke he had wanted to kill himself if he were ever unable to feed or care for himself. Joan and Rick were unsure if Mr. Jackson had been depressed, but they noted that he had been on some mood "pill" several years ago.

The medical team explained that Mr. Jackson's cancer was incurable, but with artificial feeding he could be expected to live four to six months. Also, if they denied artificial hydration (either via tube feeding or intravenously), Mr. Jackson would likely die within the next several weeks. The medical team made no specific treatment recommendation, although it acknowledged the difficulty of the decision. Based on the patient's poor prognosis and his desire to die if unable to care for himself, Joan and Rick elected to withhold both the feeding tube and intravenous fluids. Mr. Jackson returned to his board and care facility, where he died one week later, presumably of dehydration.