

Case 6: The Last Wish

Special ethical attention is placed upon the final wishes and lifelong dreams of those on death's doorstep. For example, many have heard of the organization Make-A-Wish, an organization founded specifically with the goal of fulfilling the wishes of seriously ill children. The organization is dedicated to ensuring happy memories for the children in the midst of their struggle. Similar organizations and even individuals grant wishes to those facing life-threatening illnesses all around the world.

In 2001, the granting of a unique wish from a terminally-ill boy in Australia sparked significant controversy. Christened "Jack" by the Australian media, the 15 year old boy was terminally ill with cancer. Before his death, Jack had a very specific wish in mind. Instead of going to Disneyland or meeting a famous celebrity, Jack's dream was to lose his virginity before his death. Jack had been in the hospital since the age of 12, leading him to have very little opportunity to meet girls of his own age. Jack did not have a partner and didn't feel comfortable discussing this wish with his parents, who were religious. Instead, he confided in a nurse, who referred him to a hospital psychologist. After several thorough conversations, the psychologist determined that Jack fully understood his decision and was emotionally mature.

Initially, some hospital staff who knew about Jack's wish considered helping Jack fulfill his wish by arranging a visit with a sex worker through pooling together funds. Polarized, they ultimately decided not to get involved due to legal and ethical concerns. Despite that, without his family or hospital staff knowing, some of Jack's friends independently arranged for him to meet a sex worker outside the hospital. The encounter was consensual and handled with care. Not too long afterward, Jack passed away, reportedly at peace.

The issue has sparked fierce debate over the legal and ethical implications of granting the boy's request. Professionals were torn over the correct course of action to take for situations such as Jack's. Some argued that helping Jack was an act of compassion and respected his autonomy. By honoring his wish, they were not only honoring his personal dignity, but providing a sense of emotional comfort and satisfaction. However, others questioned whether involving a sex worker was appropriate, and whether healthcare professionals should ever assist in such situations. Some contended that the act demeaned women and reduced the intimate act into being a simply physical one. In addition, Jack was under the age of consent by law, meaning that the relationship between him and the woman involved could lead to legal charges.

In a later interview, Jack's child psychologist stated that he felt no qualms over his decision, saying, "Quite clearly, the law was broken, but of the people involved, most didn't give a d-mn." However, critics still disapproved. Surely there could have been better ways to ease the

young man's feeling of loneliness, without breaking the law or making the decision without parental consent.

Discussion Questions

1. Do our moral standards soften when considering situations involving death? Do we owe any special consideration to those at the brink of death, whether that being the terminally ill, injured, or elderly? Why or why not?
2. Do we have an obligation to fulfill our loved ones' final wishes? If so, what factors do we need to take into account when considering the actions to take?
3. When, if ever, is it acceptable to prioritize individual well-being over adherence to the law? Should laws be flexible to accommodate exceptional circumstances?

Sources

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/1366166/Medical-row-over-sex-therapy-for-dying-boy.html>
<https://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/595894/posts>