

Caring for Maggie

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Finally, a real person to talk to me.

“Hello, I’m Dr. Larson. Are you a family member of Ms. Brown?”

I hope the nurse is paying attention to her blood pressures.

“I’m Bill, Maggie’s husband.”

Please tell me she’s going to be OK.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Brown, although I’m sorry it is under these circumstances. I’m an intensive care doctor who is caring for your wife. What do you know so far about why she’s here?”

How do I tell you that she’s not going to be OK?

“Our neighbor told me she found her on the ground and called 911. That’s pretty much all I know.”

I’m not ready. I’m not ready for this.

“Unfortunately it is very serious. I’m so sorry to tell you that your wife has had major bleeding in her brain.”

I’m sorry that I have to break your heart.

“How could this have happened? I just saw her this morning.”

Why didn’t I call her at lunch. If only I’d checked on her, this never would have happened.

“These things happen all of a sudden. It’s no one’s fault.”

You remind me so much of my father. I can see him sitting here, as devastated and bewildered as you are. He would be lost.

“Is she going to be OK?”

Why isn’t my son here? He would know what to do.

“I’m afraid it’s a large amount of bleeding. There is significant damage to the brain.”

If only I could save her.

“Well, can’t you stop the bleeding somehow? Take the blood out?”

I don’t understand.

“The bleeding likely has stopped, but will continue to cause problems because of swelling of her brain inside her skull. If she survives, she will likely be severely disabled.”

I can see her in a coma in a month, with a trach and feeding tube, warding off her third pneumonia.

“So what do we do now? There must be something you can do.”

I refuse to let this be the end.

“We can go in a few directions. We can be very aggressive with her care, which may keep her alive, but won’t reverse the large amount of injury that has already occurred. Or we can focus on her comfort.”

I don’t want to break her ribs with CPR. That’s no way to die.

“Do everything you can.”

You’re giving up on her. I can feel it.

“Have you ever had a conversation with your wife about what she would want in this type of situation? Does she have a living will?”

If only you knew how peaceful comfort can be, in the end. For her and for you.

“No. I don’t know.”

We never talked about these things. It was too scary.

“The important thing is to focus on what she would want.”

He doesn’t understand.

“Please save my wife.”

Miracles happen every day. Please God send a miracle.

“We’ll do everything we can for her.”

I wish I could give her peace.

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Neurology 2015;85;553-554

DOI 10.1212/WNL.0000000000001836

This information is current as of August 10, 2015

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