

# Judge: Only God can end patient's life

DOCTORS have been forced to continue to treat a "deeply religious" Sunni Muslim who is in a "minimally conscious" state after a cardiac arrest.

Hospital bosses had asked Mr Justice Newton to allow doctors to stop treating the man, who is in his 40s and has suffered brain damage.

Relatives want treatment to continue and said they had seen "purposeful responses" – and the judge has praised them for their "persistence". He said it was unfortunate that relations between hospital bosses and the man's family had become "increasingly polarised".

Mr Justice Newton published his ruling yesterday after analysing evidence earlier this month at a hearing in the Court of Protection in London.

He said the man could not be identified but the application had been made by the St George's Healthcare NHS Trust, based in London.

Barrister Parishil Patel, for the trust, had told Mr Justice Newton the man was in a "low awareness state" and required renal replacement therapy. Doctors said the therapy was "futile and overly burdensome" – and the trust wanted to withdraw it.

But barrister Vikram Sachdeva QC, who represented family members, said the trust's application should be dismissed. He said experts had thought that the

man was likely to be in a "vegetative state" but they now believe the man was in a "minimally conscious state" – and was therefore "conscious of self and environment".

He said that was "critical" – and added the balance lay in favour of therapy continuing.

The man was represented at the hearing by the Official Solicitor – a government-run office that assists vulnerable people – and barrister Bridget Dolan questioned medical experts on his behalf.

Mr Justice Newton, in his ruling, said: "The balance lies strongly in favour of preserving [the man's] life.

"The treatment is not futile, it preserves life. There is almost nothing to rebut the very strong presumption that it is in [the man's] best interests to stay alive."

Mr Justice Newton, who was told the man was "deeply religious", said: "He strongly believed life was sacred, given by God and could only be taken away by God.

"As a Sunni Muslim, he believed that suffering was a component of predestination and someone else should not play an assisting role in shortening life merely because of the subjective quality of that life."

A spokesman for the family said: "We remain concerned that we have had to fight this case all the way to court when it has always been clear [he] is responsive."

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