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News

Judge allows MS sufferer right to die

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A 68-year-old woman who is locked into the end stage of multiple sclerosis and is suffering profound indignity should be allowed to die, a judge ruled in a landmark decision yesterday.

The woman's daughter said that her mother was completely incapacitated and had asked the judge to allow medical staff to stop providing clinically assisted nutrition and hydration.

It is the first time that a court has approved the withdrawal of artificial nutrition from a patient in a minimally conscious state.

The treatment, the daughter said, was prolonging an existence without dignity or quality of life and it was not in her mother's best interests.

Mr Justice Hayden granted the daughter's application after a hearing in which he said he could not contemplate a more difficult decision.

The woman, he said, was "profoundly impaired, both physically and cognitively in consequence of the progressive degenerative impact of multiple sclerosis". Mr Justice Hayden ruled that the woman, a former hairdresser who had MS diagnosed 23 years ago and is being cared for at a specialist unit in north-west England, could not be identified.

Lawyers said that arrangements would be made for treatment to be withdrawn in line with national clinical guidelines.