

# Paralysed man told doctors to let him die

By Harry Yorke

A MAN who was left tetraplegic after falling awkwardly at home pleaded with doctors to switch off his ventilator machine because he could not bear to be paralysed, an inquest heard.

John Patterson, a 40-year-old ~~marketing manager~~ paralysed after a freak accident caused irreparable damage to his spinal cord, died of respiratory failure last September after he told medics not to resuscitate him.

Found by his wife writhing in agony after falling backwards at their home in Arborfield, Berks, Mr Patterson was taken to the Royal Berkshire Hospital in July last year, but was told his injuries would be life-changing.

With the prospect of living without control of his arms and legs unbearable, able to breathe only through the use of a ventilator, he told doctors he could not accept living as a tetraplegic, demanding that they withdraw life support equipment.

A review found that Mr Patterson was of sound mind but was likely to remain fully paralysed for the rest of his life.

Although "do not resuscitate orders" for terminally ill and dying patients are common in the NHS, cases such as Mr Patterson's - where a patient deemed to be non-terminal and mentally capable of consent requests life support to be withdrawn - are considered rare. While

assisted dying is illegal in the UK, Mr Patterson's withdrawal of consent for treatment meant that medical staff were duty-bound to discontinue it.

Giving evidence at Oxford Coroner's Court, Dr Stewart McKenzie, a consultant in intensive care medicine and anaesthetics, said Mr Patterson had refused to "accept living with this level of disability".

"A joint meeting was had with his family and it was explained the physical prognosis was life-long care. It was emphasised that some people thrust into this way of life do adjust. Mr Patterson remained resolute in his view that he wanted ventilatory support discontinued.

"It was agreed that withdrawal of support was consistent with Mr Patterson's wishes and approved. Support was withdrawn on September 10 and Mr Patterson died peacefully."

In a written statement, his widow, Lauren, described how she found her 6ft 7in husband lying "immobile" on their bedroom floor.

Giving a verdict of accidental death, senior coroner Darren Salter said Mr Patterson's death could not be recorded as "natural causes" due to the nature of the accident and his injuries. Cause of death was given as respiratory failure. "We do not know the cause of collapse... it seems it was a dizzy spell or some kind of fainting," he added.

Daily Telegraph 7 February 2017