
COVID-19 Coronavirus: English Catholic Bishops, no one can be denied life-saving care on age grounds

(London) An appeal to ensure the “decision against offering a certain life-prolonging treatment to an individual” is never “a judgement based on the worthwhileness of that person’s life, including their age or other social characteristics”. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales made it as the UK struggles to cope with a coronavirus pandemic that has not yet reached the peak, and debate is raging about who should have a “right” to be assisted if no respirators are available, and to what extent is it right to withdraw vital support. Bishops John Sherrington, Paul Mason and Richard Moth, responsible for the bioethics and mental health area, recall in a statement that “as Catholics our starting point is that we are all made equally in the image of God. Human value is not a measure of our mental or physical capacity, our societal function, our age, our health or of any other qualitative assessment. God made each of us and in so doing gave us all equal dignity and value”. “The decision against offering a certain life-prolonging treatment”, the English Bishops wrote, should be “a pragmatic decision about the likelihood” of a patient “benefiting from the intervention. This principle has been upheld in case law repeatedly and the NHS Constitution itself is clear that we should deliver care and support in a way that achieves dignity and compassion for each and every person we serve”.

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