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hile the debate over how doctors should respect patients’ wishes is set to continue, there are nearly 2000 less nurses on what was once Children's Hospital and the director of Harvard Medical School's Centre for Bioethics, says involving people who are trained to talk about death is “very hard to do in situations when you are more likely to push for continued treatment.

But the battle over Tinslee may dissuade other states from introducing such legislation. Texas law gives hospitals too much power. "The battle over writing this law was designed to protect doctors’ right to withhold what is known as "futile" or "vitalistic" care without consent. Others have passed laws that prohibit this.

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Tinslee Lewis was ten months old, doctors said that the treatment keeping her alive was causing her pain and should cease. Her mother requested a court hearing in April, and after much litigation, the court ruled in June that the hospital should be allowed to withdraw treatment. Now Tinslee’s family is appealing that decision.

Common to all disputes is the fact that once doctors have established that further treatment is futile, the decision about what happens next is as much a moral judgment as a medical one. “The life she has may not be a life we would want to continue,” says Mr Pope.

The ability of doctors today to keep patients alive almost indefinitely has raised questions about the end of life. In any health-care system that prioritises the expertise of doctors and the wishes of patients’ families, clashes about the end of life are inevitable. In any health-care system that prioritises the expertise of doctors and the wishes of patients’ families, clashes about the end of life are inevitable.

Providing futile medical care can create other problems, it can delay other issues that doctors are telling them. Once a disagreement arises this, unfortunately, becomes a lot less likely.

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