

Title	Please Let Me Die (documentary)
Director	Robert P. White
Date	1974
Area	Applied Ethics
Theme	Euthanasia
Plot Summary	<p>Ten months after being burned over 60% of his body, Dax Cowart was interviewed on videotape at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Dr. Robert White. Blind, disfigured and helpless, Dax had consistently asserted his right to refuse painful medical treatment. He had become adamant that he be allowed to leave the hospital and return home to die. Dr. White had been called in as a psychiatric consultant, and much of the twenty-nine minute documentary is a conversation between patient and psychiatrist. In the end, despite repeated declarations of competence by his psychiatrist, Dax's pleas were rejected.</p> <p>On the one hand Dax states his wishes clearly and presents his case compellingly. He does not "want to go through the pain"; he does not "want to go on as a blind and a crippled person"; and he does not understand or accept any physician's "right to keep alive a patient who wants to die." On the other, the film might be thought to hypostatize the importance of 'patient autonomy'. Doctors are portrayed as paternalistic and manipulative. Little attention is given to the main issue: what would have happened if doctors had honoured Cowart's request for discontinuation of hospital treatment. The film actually helps show the danger of an overly rigid notion of autonomy.</p>
Key Scenes	
Relevant Text	