

# Terri Schiavo's brother warns of slippery slope in health decisions

■ Bobby Schindler said he believes that people with disabilities and those suffering from brain injuries are increasingly more at risk today from health-care decisions based on physical appearance and other quality-of-life standards rather than on their right to live.

BY DEAN COUSINO

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LaSALLE — Bioethics and the Obama health-care plan will ration family medical treatment and place the elderly and medically vulnerable patients such as Terri (Schindler) Schiavo at risk of “judicial homicide,” Bobby Schindler, a well-known advocate for people with disabilities, believes.

Mr. Schindler spoke before 200 people at the Monroe County Right to Life benefit dinner about his family's 12-year struggle to keep his sister alive in 2005 after U.S. Circuit Court Judge George Greer ordered her feeding tube removed.



**BOBBY SCHINDLER**

“Make no mistake, this was a court-ordered murder issued by Judge Greer,” Mr. Schindler, 45, said at LaRoy's Hall. “Terri's life ended after two weeks of suffering without food and water and without receiving ice chips to help ease some of the pain she was experiencing.”

A former teacher at a Catholic high school in Tampa, Fla., he gave up his job to become a full-time advocate. He believes the nation and world are traveling down a slippery slope toward making decisions on whether people live or die based on their “physical appearance” or on a “whole person theory.”

He said some bioethicists believe that people with certain diseases or disabilities are “non-persons” and should not be given health care.

“You can see how dangerous this growing ethic is in our country,” Mr. Schindler said. “It's chilling what they are teaching to our future health-care providers. They're saying this person has less worth because of their outward appearance and who would want to live this way? God is being taken out of life.”

He said 20 years ago, it was unthinkable to remove a feeding tube from someone who was dependent on it.

“Today, it's accepted.”

“It could happen to anyone,” Connie Durand, a Monroe native, said after Mr. Schindler's 50-minute talk. “I have a son who suffered a head injury in 1988 and is living in a nursing home in Ohio. I'm worried they might try to kill him. There are a lot of people like him.”

Mr. Schindler agreed. There are tens of thousands of people living with traumatic brain injuries who are totally dependent on others for food and water.

“All the focus has been on my sister, but, in reality, the focus (should) be on us and how we're going to treat people like this,” he said. “What happened to Terri is happening to others.”

He spoke passionately and emotionally about his sister who collapsed under mysterious circumstances at home Feb. 25, 1990. The brain injury she suffered that night never was fully identified.

His family's battle began in 1993. Four years later, her estranged husband, Michael, was named Mrs. Schiavo's guardian and took his first legal steps to remove her feeding tube. In March, 2005, Judge Greer barred family members from restoring her tube and also prohibited them from providing any other care.

The family had to walk through armed guards, K-9 units and checkpoints to see their daughter before she died.

He said both of his parents anguished over Mrs. Schiavo's ordeal in the courts and subsequent death, but his 71-year-old father, Robert, took his grief to his own grave in August, 2009.

“He told me he was never able to (cope) with the fact that, as a father, he couldn't help care for his daughter. ... It literally killed him.”

He said the media played a major role in Mrs. Schiavo's battle to live. From the beginning, the media “repeatedly distorted facts, omitted key details and failed to verify statements” by Michael Schiavo and his attorney, Mr. Schindler said.

Contrary to media reports, he said, his sister suffered from no terminal disease or condition and did not require life-sustaining equipment such as a ventilator. Her cognitive disability did not jeopardize her life in any way, he said.

“She was simply a physically healthy woman with a profound brain injury,” he said. “The only thing keeping her alive was the same thing that keeps every one of us alive — food and water.”

“The press consistently wrote that this was a right-to-die case and that Michael Schiavo was acting in the best interest of Terri, something that is absolutely untrue,” her brother said.

Most alarming to him is how the media and Hollywood depict involuntary euthanasia. He believes they advance a “pro-death” viewpoint. He cited YouTube and TV programs such as “Law & Order,” “South Park” and “Family Guy” that have fictionalized facts in Mrs. Schiavo's case or made fun of her condition by referring to her as being brain dead or a “vegetable.”

“If you think this is not indoctrinating future generations, you're kidding yourself. It is,” he said.

Mr. Schindler can be reached at [bschindler@terrisfight.org](mailto:bschindler@terrisfight.org). For more information about his family's book, “A Life That Matters: The Legacy of Terri Schiavo — A Lesson for Us All,” visit [www.terrisfight.org](http://www.terrisfight.org).