

## Jehovah's Witness barred from making decisions for comatose wife

**IOWA CITY, Iowa - A Jehovah's Witness who would not permit blood transfusions for his comatose wife has been barred from making her medical decisions.**

Tawnya Nissen, 28, of Clinton, who has been in a coma for about two weeks, will be under the guardianship of her father until she can make her own decisions, according to a ruling issued Wednesday by a Johnson County judge.

"It's like our prayers have been answered," said Richard Reid Sr., Nissen's grandfather.

Richard Reid Jr. sought temporary guardianship of his daughter last week after her husband claimed the couple's religion prohibits the sharing of blood.

Judge Marsha Beckelman ruled against the husband "in order to protect life," but she will allow him at meetings with doctors to discuss his wife's medical condition and treatment.

"It is impossible ... for the court to definitively conclude that Ms. Nissen would either accept or decline blood transfusions, should it become necessary to save her life," Beckelman wrote.

Nissen's family said she was not a member of the Jehovah's Witness church, and that her husband Chris Nissen had not allowed them access to information about her medical condition.

Frank Santiago, the husband's attorney, said Tawnya Nissen does not have a living will but had a Jehovah's Witness identity card that instructs doctors not to administer blood transfusions.

The card could not be produced for the court.

Tawnya Nissen was hospitalized Aug. 4 with neuroleptic malignant syndrome, a condition caused by a reaction to diet pills.

Her condition is improving, but her doctor testified in court this week that she may not be able to communicate her treatment wishes for up to six months. She could require a blood transfusion if her condition worsens or if she needs a surgical airway, said Dr. Alix Ashare.

Santiago said Chris Nissen began barring the family from briefings with doctors after they began arguing about a possible blood transfusion.

Reid Jr., 54, testified that his daughter had told him she would accept the treatment if it would save her life.

Reid Sr. said his family's main concern is that his granddaughter receives proper medical care. He also criticized the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses, saying they put people at risk by denying them potentially life-saving treatment.

Church officials deny the criticism, claiming that their stance against blood transfusions has helped doctors develop alternatives to the procedure.

Greg Milakovich is the chairman of the Quad-Cities Hospital Liaison Committee for Jehovah's Witnesses, a volunteer group that works with area hospitals in addressing the needs of Jehovah's Witness patients.

He said the church urges its members to document their wishes about their medical care, and fill out a durable power of attorney for health care form.

Santiago said Chris Nissen was disappointed in the court's ruling but has not indicated a desire to appeal. He said Chris Nissen is focused on his wife's recovery.

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