

Objectives

- Discuss the difference between competency and decision making capacity
- Relate the facts and critical features of the Mary C. Northern case, Nashville, 1978
- Explain how one might establish whether or not a patient has decision making capacity
- Distinguish one's accepting death as a consequence of refusing medical treatments from "wishing to die"

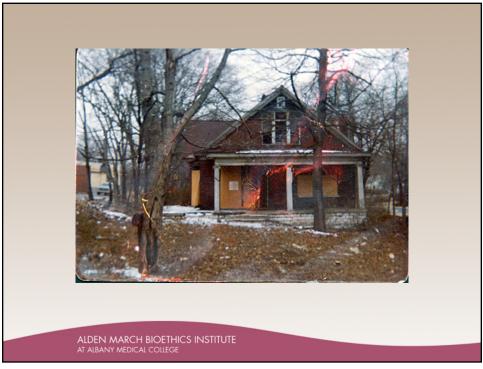
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Facts

 Miss Mary C. Northern, a 72-year-old white woman, living alone with her six cats in her inherited, partially-burned, unheated, nonelectrified, broken-windowed, garbage-strewn Gallitan Road home without running water, was taken forcibly by Nashville police to Metro General Hospital on January 17, 1978, for treatment of her bilaterally frostbitten feet and ankles, pneumonia, and congestive heart failure

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Facts

- "I think it's a terrible thing when they'll take a person's two feet against their will. I told them I don't want them to do it, and I don't want them to do it." Mary C. Northern to Carol L. McCoy, January 24, 1978. "Well, you tell him, I just don't want them to do it."
- "Her feet were pitch black, up to about the ankles of both feet." Ms. McCoy's description of Ms. Northern's feet as seen that same day.

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Facts Dr. John J. Griffin (the psychiatrist requested by Ms. McCoy) to Ms. Northern: "What's wrong with your feet?" Ms. Northern: "Nothing." Dr. Griffin: "Really. Let me take a look at them." She ignored, or denied, that there was anything wrong with her feet at first. Ms. Northern: "Well, there's just some soot on them. [They' ve been

black before.]"

 Later Dr. Griffin: "Cursing [in] a loud voice, and in the later stages of the interview, [she was] making demands that I get out"

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