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Force-Feeding

Ethicist Testifies For Hunger-Striker's Rights

By MARK SPENCER | The Hartford Courant
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A prison doctor violated professional standards when he force-fed William Coleman, even though the inmate's 16-month hunger strike had threatened his health, a medical ethicist testified Friday in a hearing at Superior Court in Hartford.

Following a patient's wishes regarding medical treatment is the most important consideration, said Arthur Caplan, a professor and director of the Center of Bioethics at the University of [Pennsylvania](#).

"In my opinion, a competent adult like Mr. Coleman has the right to refuse any and all treatment," Caplan said.

The Department of Correction is asking Judge James T. Graham to make permanent a temporary injunction he issued in January 2008 that allows the state to force-feed Coleman, who was sentenced in 2005 to eight years for raping his wife. He says the hunger strike he started in September 2007 is a protest against his conviction and a corrupt judicial system.

Caplan said two declarations by the World Medical Association, signed by the [American Medical Association](#), contain guidelines that doctors should respect a patient's request not to be treated, even prisoners.

Under questioning by Assistant Attorney General Lynn Wittenbrink, Caplan acknowledged that doctors treating someone who is willing to starve himself to death must "negotiate a difficult situation."

Caplan said he had not considered the unique challenges of treating prisoners, which he did not think were relevant.

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