

## **USEFUL PRINCIPLES FOR A REFLEXION ON ETHICS IN THE CARE OF PATIENTS WITH CEREBRAL DAMAGE**

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The respect for the principle of autonomy is essential for a patient. It has been recognized now as one of the fundamental rights that the patient has acquired on the legal and moral fields. In ethics, other principles favour the patient in his specific relation with his physician: principles of beneficence, non-maleficence and equity. Within the framework of their customary practice, the doctors have also to respect other ethical principles such as the principles of proportionality, truthfulness and precaution.

However, for a patient with cerebral damage, the respect for the principle of autonomy must be subordinated to an effective legal competence without which the decisions will be taken by third parties, family or doctor, with a risk of drifting apart from the patient's own demands. Several clinical situations may result in dilemmas or conflicts between the therapists or the nursing staffs, the patients or their close relatives.