

Moving Moribund Patients in the Emergency Room

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach

Several weeks ago the editor asked Rabbi Simcha Bunam Leizeron to clarify the halachic status of a moribund patient in the emergency room, where the patient's bed may block the passage of another patient, whose life threatening state requires that he be moved to another ward or to lifesaving apparatus. In the situation described, it would be impossible to move the second patient without moving the first bedridden patient.

The Opinion of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach

Rabbi Leizeron elaborated the question and presented it to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. This is a translation of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's response as he himself edited it:*

Regarding the moving of a moribund patient (סוג) in order to save the life of another patient, since it is of greatest importance to make every effort to try to save human life, it is permissible in such a case to move the hand or the bed of the moribund patient, with all due care. Even if considerable effort is needed to move the patient, since such movement is performed with the greatest of care, such handling is not the direct cause of death, and in any event there are only slight chances that it may accelerate death.

On the other hand, removing apparatus from the mouth or other parts of a moribund patient for use in another patient is prohibited.

*Source: ASSIA – Jewish Medical Ethics,
Vol. II, No. 2, May 1995, p. 13*

* The original Hebrew text appeared in ASSIA 55 (December, 1994) page 34.