

ABSTRACT

Mind-body Approaches Can Facilitate End-of-Life Decision Making and Life Closure Activities

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Background: Mindfulness based techniques focus one's attention on the moment, acknowledging feelings, thoughts, and sensations. Indigenous shamans journey to gain information about illness or life. Meditation, deep prayer, guided imagery create an inner space where new wisdom can be gained. These mind-body approaches share a common thread of achieving a tranquil inner state in which new insights may "appear" to patients, parents, or caregivers. A priest, rabbi, shaman, healer can guide people to a mindful state. This state can aid patients in making difficult decisions regarding healthcare, especially in those world cultures which do not easily embrace Western cognitive behavioral therapies.

Methods: We utilized a mind-body method to facilitate a mindful state. Hospitalized children and their parents were offered sessions incorporating a shamanic journey guided by an experienced practitioner, utilizing drum or rattle to focus the attention. In the mindful state, journeyers were asked to seek information regarding their condition.

Results: We conducted mindful journeying with 14 patients in the last 3 years. Families report new insights and understanding during the process and achieve new clarity on what decisions they feel they need to make. There were no psychological repercussions. Several patients were critically ill, terminally ill or legally brain dead. Families found the experience comforting, reassuring, and largely successful in achieving insights they were not able to achieve with conventional Western approaches.

Conclusion: Guided journeys to mindful states can provide patients access to information that can help them understand their illness and facilitate decision making and life closure.

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- Shamanism: An ancient and universal spiritual healing practice still used in the present day
- Found in indigenous and modern cultures throughout Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, Greenland, Native North and South America
- Pre-dates organized religion, oldest documented spiritual healing system, dating back 30,000 years



Aama Bombo-Nepalese shaman

Lauren

- 11-yo developed Goodpasture's syndrome
- Renal failure
- Nearly fatal pulmonary hemorrhage
- 3 month hospitalization



• Guiding Lauren to a mindful state



Lauren's mom, Lisa, "After Jana was there, Lauren was in a calm state."

Xavier

- Diagnosed at 6 mo. with Gauchers type II
- Progressive neurologic deterioration with seizures, myoclonus, spasticity, loss of airway control, coma
- Trach/vent at 10 months of age to extend life
- Chronic care facility for a year
- Drummed for Analisa, Geoff and Xavier on four different occasions



Geoff and Analisa holding Xavier after his life support was removed



Drumming for Analisa and Geoff for heart centered answers
What was the right decision to make in ending life support for Xavier?

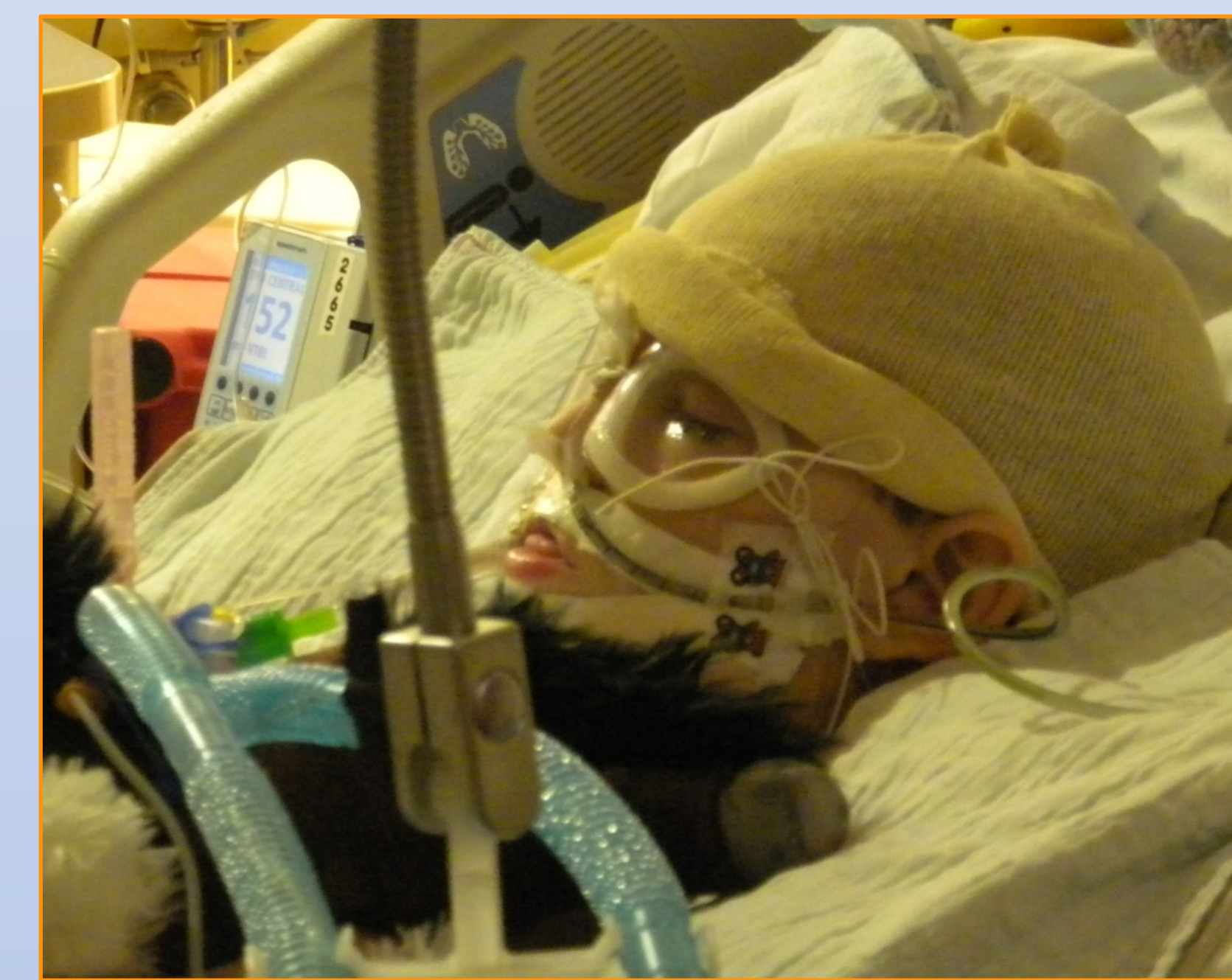
- Rinpoche, Geoff, Analisa with Xavier, Jana the afternoon after Xavier's life support was removed in the morning
- Xavier lived for three more days, allowing him to be loved and cradled in his parents and family members' arms

Analisa

"Xavier's dad and I had struggled quite a bit with when to "remove the ventilator." We consulted with a catholic diocese, the catholic committee on bioethics, several Buddhist thought leaders, and read many papers about bioethics.
Your work supported us in going deeper into ourselves, our hearts and our connecting with Xavier."

Avery

3 yr. old autistic boy with TBI



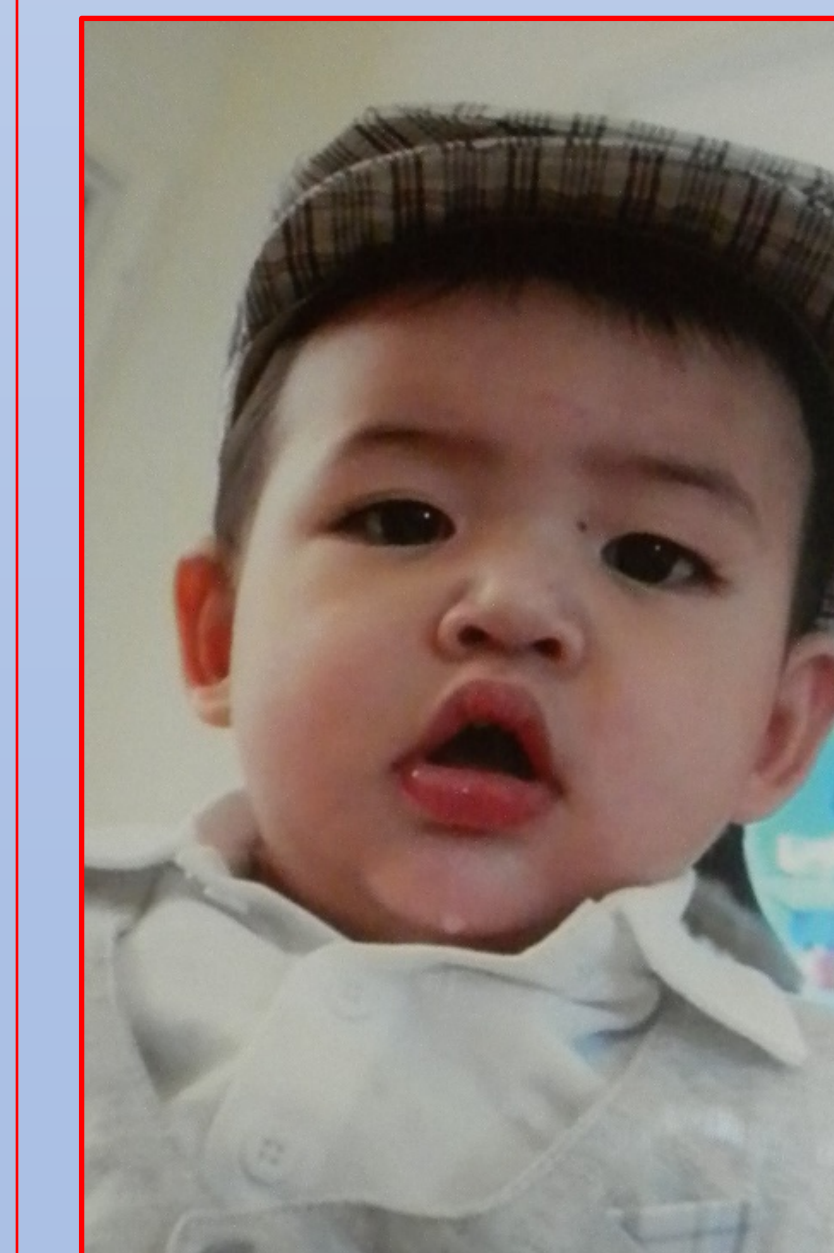
"I was overcome with emotional pain and unable to physically collect myself and get hold of my sorrow.

After the healing, I felt whole again, with joy in my heart and a sense of duty to Avery. A duty that obliges me to rise above my human emotions.....

.....emotions that are somewhat toxic and do not benefit anyone."



- 9-mo infant with TBI due to MVA
- Parents would not accept brain death
- Did not want to remove life support



Guiding Raiden's parents to determine when is the right time to remove life support



Raiden's mother said, "(She) could accept and deal with his loss because she had no "what ifs" in her heart about trying everything to save him."

Conclusion

- Shamans view health and wellness as the alignment between mind, body, spirit and soul.
- Theory: If the spirit and soul are depleted from life experiences, then the mind and body are vulnerable to disease and infection.
- The shaman supports the human spirit to allow the body to best receive Western medicine