

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910823826203321
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Titolo	The vegetative state : medical facts, ethical and legal dilemmas // Bryan Jennett
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Cambridge : , : Cambridge University Press, , 2002
ISBN	1-107-11197-8 1-280-15178-1 9786610151783 0-511-11608-X 0-511-03940-9 0-511-15707-X 0-511-30435-8 0-511-54553-3 0-511-05267-7
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (xiv, 228 pages) : digital, PDF file(s)
Disciplina	616.8/49
Soggetti	Persistent vegetative state Bioethics
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Title from publisher's bibliographic system (viewed on 05 Oct 2015).
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Cover; Half-title; Title; Copyright; Contents; Foreword; Preface; Acknowledgements; An appeal to doctors; Traumatic decortication; Abbreviations; 1 A syndrome in search of a name; 2 Diagnosis; 3 Epidemiology; 4 Pathology of the brain damage; 5 Prognosis for recovery and survival; 6 Attitudes to the permanent vegetative state; 7 Medical management; 8 Ethical issues; 9 Legal issues in the United States; 10 Legal issues in Britain; 11 Legal issues in other countries; 12 Details of some landmark legal cases; Epilogue; Index
Sommario/riassunto	The strange and harrowing sight of a person being awake but unaware with no evidence of a working mind - the characteristics of the vegetative state - provokes intense debate and raises profound questions for health professionals, ethicists, philosophers and lawyers. This unique account by an unrivalled expert in the field, who himself

collaborated in coining the term 'persistent vegetative state', surveys the medical, ethical and legal issues that surround this controversial topic. The medical definition and criteria for diagnosis are discussed, as are its frequency and causes, and possible outcomes. Ethical arguments discussed include the conflict between sanctity of life and respect for the autonomy and best interests of the victim, and between killing and letting die. Legal issues are explored with details of landmark court cases from the USA, Britain and elsewhere. This well-informed and carefully constructed account will be a benchmark for medical specialists, ethicists, lawyers and philosophers.

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