

END OF LIFE

## Newborn baby's transferral from Bristol to Rome for life-saving operation, opens breach in British system

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

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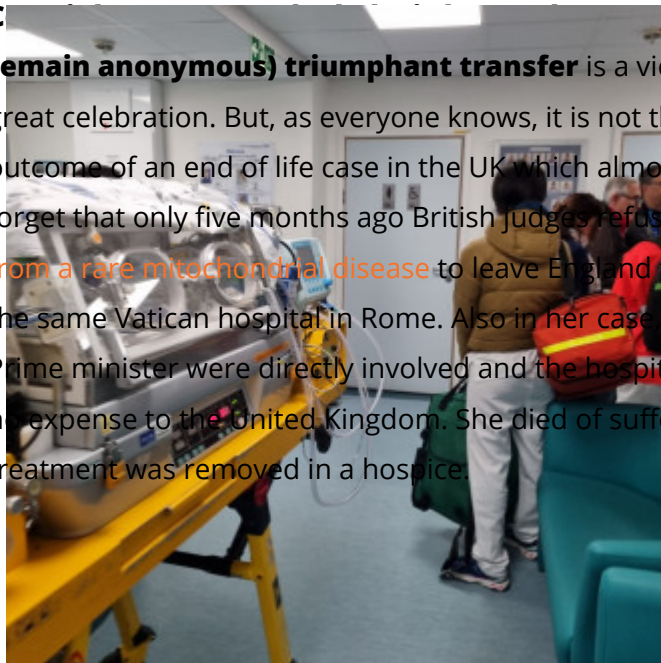


The **one-month old baby**, dramatically airlifted to Italy for life-saving surgery after

doctors at NHS Bristol Royal Hospital for Children said he was “not fit” to operate, “is doing well” says his dad. The baby boy, son of an Italian citizen and Nigerian mother, arrived at the Vatican children’s hospital Bambino Gesù in Rome late evening on Tuesday April 24 and the next day successfully underwent the first of two scheduled cardiac operations for a congenital heart condition. After the operation, Italian doctors said, “he is fighting” and “wants to live”.

**A week ago, Bristol NHS doctors had told the devout Catholic family** that according to UK medical protocols their son was too ill to be operated on. This prompted the father to write to the Vatican hospital requesting they take over his treatment. A separate request was made through the family’s Italian lawyer Simon Pillon, to the Italian government requesting assistance with his transfer. According to Pillon, the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni was directly involved in arrangements to fly the baby in a specially equipped military cargo plane with a full medical team. The news and photo of the specially equipped ambulance being loaded into the hold of the Italian military aircraft before take off for Rome, made news headlines across the globe.

**C** **est of his parents who wish to remain anonymous) triumphant transfer** is a victory for life and therefore cause for great celebration. But, as everyone knows, it is not the typical and by now expected outcome of an end of life case in the UK which almost routinely end in tragedy. We can’t forget that only five months ago British judges refused to allow **Indi Gregory suffering from a rare mitochondrial disease** to leave England to receive life saving treatment at the same Vatican hospital in Rome. Also in her case, the Italian government and its Prime minister were directly involved and the hospital had agreed to treat baby Indi at no expense to the United Kingdom. She died of suffocation after her life support treatment was removed in a hospice.



**It is difficult to consider the case of D.M. represents a U-turn in the UK system.**

Sadly, just in these days another end of life case involving a four year-old boy has been playing out in the courts in England. The youngster who was born deaf and blind has been on life support at King's College Hospital since last year after suffering two heart attacks caused by a serious brain infection. On April 24, Mr Justice Poole ruled that his doctors could legally withdraw the boy's life support. In his statement, the judge said, "he should not be forced to live" even if ironically by default, he was forcing the youngster to die. His family, practicing Catholics, told Mr Justice Poole their "son was a gift of God". They had also appealed to the Vatican hospital to take their son but like Indi transfer was denied by the courts.

**The *Daily Compass* put the seemingly arbitrary way these end of life cases** are handled to Simon Pillon who helped facilitate D.M.'s successful move to the Vatican hospital and had been involved in the failed attempt to transfer Indi Gregory. According to Pillon, the successful outcome of this case depended on timing "Essentially, negotiations for the baby's transfer took place before the case went to court", he said. "This facilitated constructive dialogue which allowed the development of a consensual protocol for the baby's transfer and convalescence in Italy." He also admitted that the speed with which both sides agreed to the transfer had been fundamental for a successful outcome. Talking about D.M.'s parents' first court hearing scheduled for Monday April 29, he said "we managed to avoid that". He now hopes this case will favour future cases. "The UK has seen the level of medical expertise the Italian health service is capable of", he said. But, he admitted that cases are also determined by the individual convictions of hospital doctors and ultimately the judges.

**But, there is another factor which permeates all these end of life cases:** how life in all its states is valued in the UK and the God-like role that the State exercises over its citizens if they are disabled. This factor was noted by D.M.'s parents when they confided that they were invited to abort their son at every hospital appointment right up to three days before his birth after doctors diagnosed his heart problems. Also Dean Gregory recounted he and Indi's mother Claire had been pressured to abort Indi up to birth because the baby was disabled. Hollie Dance noted that she was asked to donate Archie Battersbee's organs from the second day he was in hospital. Moreover, a protocol for the transfer of Alfie Evans had been drawn up even before his case went to court but was refused. Next week, the family of Sudiksha Thirumalesh, the 19 year-old who suffered from a genetic disease and who was put to death although she was contrary to the decision to end her life, will be fighting in court to prove that her

disagreement with the doctor's judgement did not depend on her inability to comprehend her situation but on her courageous will to live with a disability. All these families asked for one thing, the chance to let their loved ones live to their natural end. But which was denied to each and everyone of them.

**Over the years, the *Daily Compass* has covered numerous end of life cases** in detail, closely involved with the families. It's difficult to describe the anguish caused by a protracted legal battle, the insuppressible hope to save their child which drives families on and the devastation when death has the final word. In hindsight, it's difficult not to wonder if perhaps the real miracle is not recovery but getting out of the UK and having that **chance to live for as long as life decides**.