

Dear Senator Johnson,

My name is Debbie Smith, and I am writing to share the story of my husband, Lee “Andy” Smith, who died on January 6, 2022, after being hospitalized at Hershey Medical Center in Pennsylvania.

Andy was 64 years old, born with cerebral palsy, but he never allowed that to define his life. He owned and operated his own landscaping business, worked hard every day, loved Jesus deeply, and was devoted to our family. We were married for more than 34 years and raised three children together, including our daughter adopted from Cambodia.

In December 2021, Andy became sick with COVID symptoms and was admitted to the hospital. From the very beginning, I felt his treatment was determined by his vaccination status. A resident came into the room and told Andy directly, “You were unvaccinated, so there’s nothing we can do for you.” I knew immediately something was wrong.

Very quickly, the hospital pushed aggressive oxygen interventions and then ventilation. Staff repeatedly pressured him with statements like, “You want to breathe, don’t you?” while escalating his care toward intubation.

Once hospitalized, our family was largely cut off from him. Communication became controlled through occasional FaceTime calls arranged by staff. We could not freely advocate for him or monitor what was happening.

Andy was given remdesivir and we were told he would be part of a study, but we never received meaningful informed consent or follow-up information about that. He was also given fentanyl, morphine, baricitinib, paralytics, and other powerful medications.

One night while he was still on BiPAP, he became desperately thirsty and was banging his urinal against the bed rails trying to get someone’s attention. Watching him suffer while feeling powerless to help him is something I will never forget.

Over time, I felt my husband stopped being treated as a human being and instead became another protocol patient. The family’s concerns were dismissed, communication was restricted, and his condition steadily declined until he died on January 6, 2022.

Just weeks before his hospitalization, our entire family had taken a vacation together to the Dominican Republic. It became our last trip together and our last happy memories before everything changed.

I am sharing Andy’s story because I do not want what happened to him to be forgotten. I believe families across this country experienced many of these same patterns during COVID hospitalizations, and those families deserve to be heard.

Sincerely,

Debbie Smith