Case for Analysis

A 60 yo man with moderate dementia is admitted to the hospital from a nursing home due to COPD exacerbation, and during his physical the medical team also finds significant ulcers on both of his legs. His daughter is his surrogate decision maker. She insists on general anesthesia for the debridement of his leg ulcers. The anesthesiologist and assistant believe the patient would be better served with a spinal anesthetic. The daughter explains that her father had always expressed disdain for spinal anesthetics after his uncle received one during World War II and returned home paraplegic.

1. What are the relevant facts? (medical state, psychological state, social situation, feasible options)

1a. What is ethically relevant but unknown?

2. Who or what could be affected by the way the decision is resolved? (ethical stakeholders – individuals, institutions, society)
3. What are the relevant ethical considerations? (such as patient autonomy, professional integrity, fairness, patient welfare, respect, pluralism/diversity, religious freedom)

4. What is the primary ethics question? Secondary questions? (separate from purely legal, cultural, medical questions)

5. Who is morally responsible for what? (roles, institutional constraints)

6. What might be ethically permissible or ethically impermissible?