

Kevorkian admits assistance



SOUTHFIELD, Mich. (AP) — Dr. Jack Kevorkian flatly admitted he assisted a man in "a merciful suicide" Wednesday and blamed the medical profession and the government for making terminally ill people suffer.

"I assisted Thomas Hyde in a merciful suicide. There's no doubt about that. I state it emphatically," Kevorkian told reporters outside of his lawyer's Southfield office. "I will always do so when a patient needs it, because I'm a physician."

Hyde, 30, of Novi, inhaled carbon monoxide on Belle Isle, an island in the Detroit River, said Kevorkian, attorney Michael Schwartz. Hyde suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a degenerative nerve disorder also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, Schwartz said.

It was the second time Kevorkian has been present at a suicide since a new state law banning assisted suicide took effect in February. No charges have been brought in the May 16 death of a Southfield man.

In the last two deaths involving Kevorkian before Hyde's death on Wednesday, his lawyers have said only that he was present, a change from descriptions of him assisting suicides in most previous cases.

The new Michigan law, passed last year in response to Kevorkian, imposes a penalty of up to four years in prison and a \$2,000 fine for violators.

Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Cynthia Stevens overturned the law on technical grounds May 20. But the state Court of Appeals blocked Stevens' ruling in June while it reviews the case.

Schwartz said Kevorkian did not violate the assisted-suicide law in Hyde's death Wednesday.

Kevorkian thrashed the medical profession for not taking a stand on the issue.

"They're politicians first, businessmen second, and they ought to be ashamed of themselves to have human beings like Thomas Hyde suffer immensely, unable to move any muscle, cannot speak, cannot swallow, have pain in addition to all that, and they turn their heads because 'We've got

to discuss this a little more," Kevorkian said.

"The world knows there's a need for this. The talk is senseless, pointless; there's nothing new to be said about this."

Police Inspector Gerald Stewart refused to discuss the investigation of Hyde's death other than to say Kevorkian was questioned and released.

"If we come up with the elements necessary to proceed with charges, we will," Stewart said.

Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair said that in addition to considering whether the law was broken in deciding whether to press charges, his office would consider the chances of the state law being overturned.

Neighbors at Hyde's townhouse complex about 30 miles west of Detroit said he used a wheelchair and appeared depressed earlier this week. He apparently shared the apartment with his wife and daughter, but no one answered the door Wednesday.

David Wasielewski, 27, said he lived next door for about a year but had only a nodding acquaintance with him. He said he saw Hyde returning to his apartment Tuesday.

"We made eye contact and I waved to him," Wasielewski said. "But he looked really depressed. He was staring into space. Usually, he looks good. I don't believe this."

Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, helped an Oregon woman commit suicide in 1990 and since has crusaded for doctor-assisted suicide for some terminally ill people.

Paul Denepole, legal director of the Michigan chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said prosecuting Kevorkian in Hyde's death would be difficult. The ACLU has challenged the state law on behalf of two terminal cancer patients, a pharmacist and six doctors.

"Dr. Kevorkian has the ability to exercise his Fifth Amendment rights and refuse to make a statement to police," Denepole said. "It would be up to authorities to prove Dr. Kevorkian committed a crime before he could be charged."

Denepole said simply watching a suicide doesn't violate the law.

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Self-amputee recovering well

HARMARVILLE, Pa. (AP) — To a husky outdoorsman brave enough to saw through his pinned leg with a knife, the ordeal of recovery seems simple.

"Nothing compares to my challenge in the woods," Donald Wyman said Wednesday. "It's all downhill from now on."

Just two weeks ago, Wyman was cutting logs about 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh when an oak tree suddenly came free and landed on his leg, breaking two bones.

Wyman fashioned a tourniquet with a chainsaw cord, cut through what was left of his leg with a pocketknife, crawled through mud to his bulldozer, drove to his stick-shift truck and, using his good leg on the clutch and gas, drove the truck two miles to a nearby farm for help. It took about an hour.

After several days in the hospital, Wyman transferred to Harmarville Rehabilitation Center near Pittsburgh. His routine includes stair climbing and lift-

ing a 10-pound weight with his injured leg. He is going home next week to New Bethlehem in western Pennsylvania.

Wyman recounted the excruciating accident while lifting 40 pounds of iron with his arms, a key part of his efforts to resume driving bulldozers, building houses and hunting deer.

Like most amputees, Wyman senses tingling "like when your elbow's asleep" in the space where the leg used to be. The accident left him with only half of his left leg.

His doctor said Wyman, perhaps wanting to "tough it out," is losing sleep because he won't take addictive medicine to ease pain from swelling.

But Wyman's "can-do" attitude is hastening his recovery, said Dr. Thomas Franz of the Harmarville Rehabilitation Center.

"He had to have a lot of determination to do what he did in the first place," Franz said.

Wyman's story brings him letters each day from as far away as

Hawaii. One admirer stopped him halfway through his daily trip in a wheelchair down the center's quarter-mile, extra-wide hallway.

"I just wanted to tell you that it's just a terrific thing you did," said Jennie Maszle, who was visiting a friend.

Wyman will be fitted for an artificial leg later this month.

The steelworker's son and former fullback, whose nickname is "Butch," said the choice he faced in the woods or bleed to death. His co-workers had gone home, making a rescue unlikely.

Doctors at Punxsutawney Hospital could not reattach the mangled leg, which was retrieved by paramedics.

He wants to be on his bulldozer for the 6 a.m. shift as early as he can at Original Fuels, a coal company. Also ahead is more log cutting for a new house, the foundation of which is already down.

"I'll take somebody with me next time," he said.

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