

Measure 16: dignified death

Larry Haftl

Your editorial opposition to Ballot Measure 16, Oregon's "Death with Dignity" act, is surprising. Your self-serving distortions are insulting. I can understand opposition to Measure 16 coming from the medical community which profits from servicing terminally ill people. I can also understand opposition from the religious community that demands that everyone live by its rules or rot in hell.

Your newspaper purports to be a tireless champion in the fight to secure a person's "right to choose." Why do you then deny a terminally ill person the right to choose a peaceful death on his/her own terms?

Let's get the facts straight. All this measure does is "allow terminally ill adult patients voluntary informed choice to obtain physician's prescription for drugs to end life." It does not, as Brian Womack stated, "call for death by drugs if the patient is diagnosed to die within six months." Don't worry Brian, neither you nor a doctor will, "be the one who decides that someone should die and then find out I was wrong." Only a terminally ill adult can make that decision for themselves. Even they cannot make that decision until they have jumped through a series of society-enforced hoops.

Just to qualify for the right to get a prescription you must:

1. be diagnosed as terminally ill with less than six months to live.

2. have that diagnosis confirmed by at least one other physician.

3. convince both physicians that you do not have a mental disorder or impaired judgment from depression.

4. submit two oral requests and one written request for the prescription.

5. wait at least 15 days to see if anything, including your opinion, has changed.

After all that you finally get a prescription for the drugs. You, as a person facing certain and imminent death, still have to decide when, how and even if you will take the drugs.

As to malevolent doctors, since it is far more profitable for a physician to keep you alive, it is extremely unlikely that, "Manipulation of the patient to take his or her life could go unnoticed." One look at who offers arguments in opposition in the voters' pamphlet tells you what doctors are really concerned about. "If assisted suicide is legalized, it could become a primary treatment option, replacing comfort, care and pain management."

Heaven forbid terminally ill patients should have options that threaten the fat profits physicians and medical institutions make.

Death will come to all. For many it will come too soon, for others it will not come soon

enough. For some of us there will come a time when all that is left of life is a few months of diminishing capacity and pain.

Why must it be illegal to say enough is enough? Why aren't we allowed to say, "I've lived a full and useful life and now I would like to end it with a bit of grace and dignity?" Why must we be forced to stay if we know beyond any doubt that it's time to go? Why do we have no choice in this most personal of matters?

I totally agree that terminally ill people should never be forced or even pressured to end their lives before they themselves think it's time. I also agree that just thinking it's time is not good enough.

There must be safeguards against poor judgment or diminished capacity. Measure 16 has those safeguards.

We demand the right to choose where and how and with whom we live. Why is it that we do not demand the right, if it's possible, to choose how and when we die? Is it the ignorance and arrogance of youth or simply a deep-seated fear of death that does not permit us to entertain such thoughts? Is it so hard to accept that, as wonderful as life is, there may come a time when we may, with clear purpose of will, want to end it gracefully and with dignity? Measure 16 gives us that option. Finally.

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