



Forum

Death with dignity upholds freedom of choice

KAITLYN LATHROP

Staff Reporter

Suicide: a last resort; considered to be the worst way "out." In almost all cases when someone commits suicide, there is no benefit and it is done out of feelings like depression and hopelessness. What if, instead of causing physical and emotional pain to the victim and their family and friends, it alleviates suffering?

According to U.S. law, committing suicide is illegal.

However, there is a law that states that someone with a fatal illness can use medication prescribed by their doctor to commit suicide. So far, Oregon is the only state that permits it. If a doctor anywhere, other than Oregon, assisted their patient in committing suicide, it would be considered murder. In assisted suicide, there are strict conditions. The patient must pass a round of psychological testing and not have any mental

illness. There must be two witnesses, one must have no family relation to the patient. The first time they ask their doctor, they have to wait at least 15 days and then ask a second time. The doctor will then give them the pills that will stop the heart shortly after they are taken. All that's left is for the patient to decide when to take them.

This is perhaps the most controversial law, ethically and politically. Some who oppose it may because they

believe that "giving up" isn't the option no matter how bleak the prognosis, while those who favor it believe that if someone will definitely die from their ailment, why suffer until then? Surprisingly, this isn't the main argument for congress. The government already tells us many things we can, can't, or have to do, so shouldn't we at least have a say over what we do with our bodies? Does the administration make it illegal in all states

but one because they think it's ethically wrong, or is it really an attempt to have control over one of the few things they don't have a say in? Another issue raised is separation of church and state, as many religions consider committing suicide against God. This isn't supposed to affect congress' decisions, as separation of church and state prohibits it. Legally, "death with dignity," what committing suicide in that circumstance is called, cannot be influenced by religion.

What we choose to do to ourselves physically cannot and should not be under the government's control. The first amendment, freedom of speech, states that we are free to practice any form of speech. Why couldn't there be "freedom of physical speech," and it specifically catered to the right that we choose what happens to our bodies? If a terminal cancer patient has nothing to live for but six months of worsening pain and suffering, shouldn't their wants for themselves matter? As American citizens

living in a democracy, we should be allowed to have control over our minds and bodies. As Maya Angelou once said, "making a living is not the same as making a life." Life is filled with beauty and happiness, but it always ends in death. Suicide is another word for death, and death is something we all fear. The sooner we accept it, the sooner we accept the fact that no matter how much power we want or have, there are some things we cannot and should not control.

Live with dignity instead of dying with it

KAITLYN RAGAN

Staff Reporter

The Death with Dignity Act is an Oregon bill enacted in 1997 which allows terminally-ill patients to request that their life be ended by a physician. I know that assisted suicide is a very touchy subject, and that it is highly personal, yet I cannot help voicing my opinion. I know that I have never experienced what it feels like to be on my death bed and cannot even imagine what pain these people must be in, but I do not believe that anyone's life should be prematurely ended.

I believe that every minute of life is given for a reason and that each and every one is equally important, even those moments right before death. I believe in miracles. Even if a patient is not healed, he or she may make decisions, have thoughts and say things to loved ones that can change lives. I know to some this point will be completely irrelevant or even

stupid, but I believe that there is a life after death and that people's minds and hearts can be changed in even the last seconds of life in ways that make a difference. Who are we to take those away? It seems inconsiderate to say that someone who is sick is less valuable than someone who is healthy. All life is precious.

The fact that America has a separation of church and state is sure to be used in rebuttal to this argument; however when it comes to issues like this, how can we possibly make a decision based on anything but morality? And really, if you think about it, all our laws are founded on values and principles that, even though we may not want to admit it, all link somehow back to faith-based beliefs, especially in America.

Killing is simply not right. If someone was convicted of murder, even if it was found that the victim had asked to be killed, would that make them any less guilty or the

crime any less wrong? I know that the process of making sure the patient is mentally capable and that the illness cannot be cured is extensive meant to avoid and but

error abuse, I do not think we are qualified to decide whether the quality of a person's life is worth sustaining. If we do come to the conclusion that people should be able to choose whether their life continues or ends, then how do we decide under what circumstances this decision be allowed? Oregon is the only state in the country that has a law like this one, and there is a reason for that. Suicide is illegal and how does the act being done by a qualified professional make it less wrong? Even if you don't agree that suicide should be against the law, this point should at least show a major contradiction in the legality of the situation. If we say that someone should be able to decide whether they live or die, who are we then to put parameters on under what specific circumstances and terms that decision be made? We either give them the whole right or we don't, otherwise it just doesn't make sense.

Another contradiction I see with the Act is the fact that doctors are no longer simply healers but sometimes killers. Doctors are only responsible to cure their patients if the patients want it, otherwise that person is welcome to sign a paper, be examined by

a psychiatrist, recite a written request in front of witnesses and have the physician provide them with

drugs that will kill them instead. This seems ironic. For reasons beyond faith and morality, if new treatments

are found which could have saved someone's life, or there was a misdiagnosis? Even if these possibilities are highly improbable they should not be ignored. We're dealing with life and death here and all possibilities for error must be examined. We have to decide whether we have enough faith in ourselves and our own understanding to make such a decision as this. If we kill someone we must be absolutely sure that it is for credible and honorable reasons; and frankly, I'm just not convinced.

Amplifier

West Linn High School, 5464 West A Street, West Linn, OR 97068
(503) 673-7843 • fax: (503) 657-8710 •
wlhs-amplifier@wlhs.wlww.k12.or.us

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Contributing Writer

Valorie Wallace

Photographers

Sarah Chicoine, Jon Helmkamp,

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Adviser

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DEATH WITH DIGNITY

1997

The year that Oregonians passed Ballot Measure 16.

51.3%

Margin by which Ballot Measure 16 was passed.

292

Number of Oregonians who have utilized assisted suicide to end their lives.