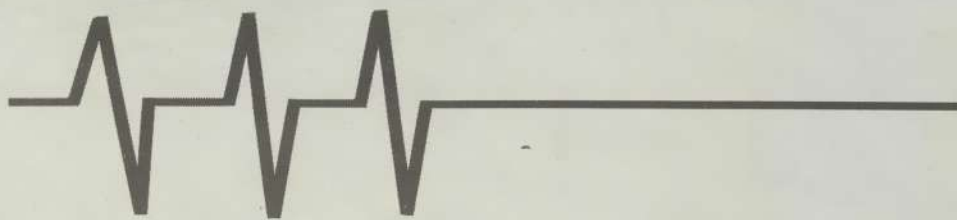


FACE OFF:

DOCTOR-ASSISTED SUICIDE?



Assisted suicide unsound practice, doctor 'plays God'

Shannon Armstead
Commentary Editor



The battle over doctor-assisted suicide is heating up again in Oregon, the only state that allows it, and it is about time this means of killing pain by killing patients was put to death.

The term "suicide" in "doctor-assisted suicide" should alert the average person that there is something inherently wrong with the practice. While doctor-assisted suicide is touted as compassionate by its supporters, in reality the practice is irrational, can be easily abused, and has nothing to do with patient welfare.

In a country where suicide is the eighth leading cause of death, it is not surprising that there are many requests for assisted suicide. In her article for *Physician's News Digest*, medical doctor Hilary Evans cites that one third of the requests for assisted suicide are due to physical symptoms, of these, half are pain and half are symptoms such as difficulty breathing, weakness and nausea. The other two-thirds of requests are due to the patient's concern of loss of control, loss of dignity, being a burden and being dependent.

"Such attitudes," wrote Evans, "should alert us to depression. Indeed, a major factor in requests for suicide is depression, even when it is secondary to physical symptoms or a general state of helplessness. Depressed patients who request suicide frequently change their minds, yet physicians fail to recognize treatable depression in about fifty percent of cases."

In practice, the physician "plays God" deciding who will or will not get to be "saved" from their pain. Doctors are to identify whether or not the patient is depressed and predict that they will die of natural causes within six months. Yet

medical doctors have never been qualified as determiners of whether or not a person is depressed and are usually inaccurate in predicting when a patient will die.

Dr. Hedlin, professor of psychiatry at New York Medical College did extensive studies on euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide practices in the Netherlands; his work was cited by the U.S. Supreme Court in its decision that there was no constitutional right to assisted suicide. Hedlin found that doctors were unlikely to suggest "palliative care," or before death compassionate care and medication, when given the easier option of assisted suicide.

Hedlin demonstrates the slippery slope effect that concerns disability-rights activists, where assisted-suicides become "mercykillings." He notes that doctors in the Netherlands admitted that they felt free to suggest euthanasia to their patients, and some had even gone ahead with euthanasia without the permission of patients because they felt it was the best option given the patient's disabilities.

While the opposition to assisted suicide has been characterized as religious busybodies, the liberal, disability-rights community has made the greatest effort in thwarting the efforts of the assisted-suicide movement with energetic commitment.

There is a reason why Oregon is the only state where assisted suicide is legal and the Netherlands are already abusing their assisted suicide program. For over two millennia the practice has been seen as morally unsound by pagans, Jews, Muslims and Christians alike, and does not provide a patient with any kind of compassionate pain relief.

Patients have right to die in manner they deem appropriate



Cassandra Mathieson
The Clackamas Print

Dying of a degenerative terminal illness is one of the most awful things a person may ever experience. Inarguably it is an encounter that most of us would choose to live without if given the option to do so, and although we as human beings may not be able to avoid death in entirety, we should definitely be able to decide whether or not we would like to live through the tremendous agony and suffering that comes in the last stages of most fatal illnesses.

Currently Oregon is the only state in which doctor-assisted suicide, or euthanasia, is legal. In section two of the Oregon Death with Dignity act, implemented on Oct. 27 of 1997, it states that "An adult who is capable, is a resident of Oregon, and has been determined by the attending physician and consulting physician to be suffering from a terminal disease, and who has voluntarily expressed his or her wish to die, may make a written request for medication for the purpose of ending his or her life in a humane and dignified manner in accordance with this Act."

There is no logical reason that doctor-assisted suicide should ever become illegalized in Oregon, nor should it remain illegal in any of the other locations where it is now. How is America truly the land of the free when one can't even make the choice to end their own life in a manner that is peaceful and humane, rather than waiting until they die a slow, painful, and anguish-filled death?

When someone is suffering from AIDS, for example, the final stages of the disease often include the onset of opportunistic infections such as the cytomegalovirus, a virus that infects the entire body and often causes severe colitis, fevers, throat ulcerations and encephalitis; or toxoplasmosis, a parasite that primarily infects the brain and causes immense confusion and delusional behavior, severe headaches, seizures and coma.

When someone is in the last stage of Alzheimer's disease, the most prominent form of dementia, they suffer from a severe cognitive decline. All of their verbal abilities are lost, and frequently there is no speech save the occasional grunt or moan. They also suffer from incontinence of urine and require complete assistance with all of their day to day needs. They lose their ability to walk and sit upright, and their brain loses all ability to control their bodily movements.

Euthanasia should remain legal in Oregon and should become so in every state where it is currently not. It is morally inept to deny these victims their inherent right to freewill. If they are condemned to a terminal disease that will continue to cause them a steadily worsening amount of pain until they inevitably die; we should at the very least allow them the right to avoid as much misery as possible, and to have their loved ones remember them in the way they wish to be remembered. At very least we should allow them the right to die in the manner they deem appropriate.

"Indeed a major factor in requests for suicides is depression, even when it is secondary to physical symptoms..."

Hilary Evans, Medical Doctor

How is America truly the land of the free when one can't even make the choice to end their own life in a manner that is peaceful and humane.

Student Poll

What is your take on euthanasia?



"It is a good thing. It should be a personal and situational decision and I think it should be covered by medical insurance."

Mitchell Pennell



"I think it is a bad thing because people shouldn't want to end their lives and should want to live as long as possible."

Travis Yunkil



"I think it's a good thing, course. People should have the choice if they want to instead of suffering."

Thyra Burnett



"It is a bad thing because people shouldn't waste their lives on something like that."

Nick Sabel



"It should require a lot of thought, but it is good because delaying death doesn't cause less pain if someone is going to die anyway."

Adam J. Manley

This week's poll compiled by Laura Cameron and Amy S. ell.

the CLACKAMAS Print

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The Clackamas Print is a weekly student publication and is distributed every Wednesday except final weeks.

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