

Face Off: assisted suicide ruling

Aiding suicide undermines basic tenets of medicine

Elizabeth Hitz

As long as humankind has possessed an intelligent mind they have contemplated suicide. Man has a deep, hair-raising fascination with the desperate ancient Japanese warriors killed themselves when they brought dishonor to their families or were defeated in battle. By contrast, within the Catholic Church suicide is considered an unforgivable sin.

On Nov. 8, 1994 Oregon Voters passed Measure 16, better known as the Death with Dignity Act. This law allows patients with terminal illnesses, whom at least two doctors have less than six months left to live, to ask their doctor to kill them so they can die humanely and with dignity. The law requires that the patient be at least 18 (or over) and attend one or more consultations with a psychologist to determine that the person who wishes to commit suicide is mentally sound. Several attempts have been made to repeal the act. The latest one was overturned on Jan. 17 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

My question is this: can handing out prescription drugs, even to terminal ill patients, be considered a justifiable medical practice by any ethical doctor? Whatever happened to the physician's Hippocratic cry of "do no harm?"

Lasagna, academic dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, wrote the Hippocratic Oath in 1964. The new version is used in most medical colleges today. The new oath may reflect current society and views of medicine, but it has also done away with "do no harm" in favor of "it may be within my power to take a life."

Since the bill has been passed 208 people have taken advantage of the right to die. People who woke up every morning racked with pain, despairing of any real good in their lives enough to

call their doctor and tell him, "I want to die today."

I can not possibly comprehend the constant ravaging pain and hopelessness that would drive someone to want to end their own life. But if the pain is the reason someone wants to die, then why aren't trauma victims in chronic pain given the same right? Why limit the law to those who are going to die in six months? The whole thing stinks more of fear than a need for the pain to end.

The matter of suicide could easily be divided into two major views. Human rights and nonreligious liberals would take one view. People have rights. They should legally be able to kill themselves, especially if those people are going to die painfully within six months anyway. Besides, this way they relieve the heavy burden they place upon society and HMO's, thus providing cheaper and better healthcare for those who really need it.

Those who come from a religious stance might see the matter in another light. In many religions pain or hardship is considered an ordeal that builds character and brings that person closer to their faith. Not only that, but to those with faiths that demand obedience to a higher deity (yes, Christians), suicide is considered a lack of trust in God and an act of direct disobedience.

No matter how you package the idea, with glittery red tape and fancy wrapping paper, suicide remains what it is and always has been — an escape from reality, and in my eyes, the chicken's way out.

Court's ruling upholds state and patients' rights

Derek Erickson

The Clackamas Print

The Supreme Court did something shocking last week, something wonderful, something that should be done more often on a number of issues: they upheld a state's right to make its own laws.

Here in Oregon we have had our laws challenged by the federal government for some time. We as Oregon voters are the ones that put these laws into place.

So does it seem fair for the federal government to step in on every social issue that doesn't tie into their dogma?

Oregon is one of the only states left any-

more with a suicide law, as all the other states that once had them have had them repealed.

The Oregon law allows a doctor to prescribe a lethal dosage of barbiturates to a terminal

patient that is in intolerable amounts of pain. According to MSNBC, at least 171 people have taken this route since 1998, most of them cancer patients. People that receive the lethal dose of medication don't have it administered to them.

The Oregon law can be found at egov.oregon.gov, along with the criteria for receiving physician assisted suicide.

In short it states that the patient must be at least 18, a resident of Oregon, capable of making their own health care decisions and have a terminal illness with less than six months left to live.

After the patient has requested the Death with Dignity program, there is a 15-day waiting period before the prescription is given. Oftentimes during this 15 day period a psychological exam is required by the M.D. prescribing the medication.

For George Bush to attempt to butt in with federal politics again and take this law away from our state is ridiculous. His administration's religious fanaticism was attempting to rob residents of Oregon their right to die without the costly, humiliating and painful symptoms that afflict them.

When people think of our suicide law, they often relate it to Dr. Jack Kevorkian and his work. Others have heard of euthanasia. Euthanasia and Dr. Kevorkian are entirely aside of what happens in Oregon. No one hooked up to a death machine, half-conscious as someone pushes a button or fills a needle.

These are sane and consenting adults that don't want six more months hooked up to mechanical support with no control over their bodily functions, or in so much pain that they have to live in a near-coma to deal with it.

These people want out and know exactly what that means.

On Jan. 17, residents of our state saw federal justice done correctly, because nothing was changed at all. Thanks to the voices of the patients and the voices of Oregon residents, the "Death with Dignity Act," a citizen's initiative that was passed by a majority of Oregon voters, still stands to help those who have no quality of life left.

For more information on physician assisted suicide visit <http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/faqs.shtml>

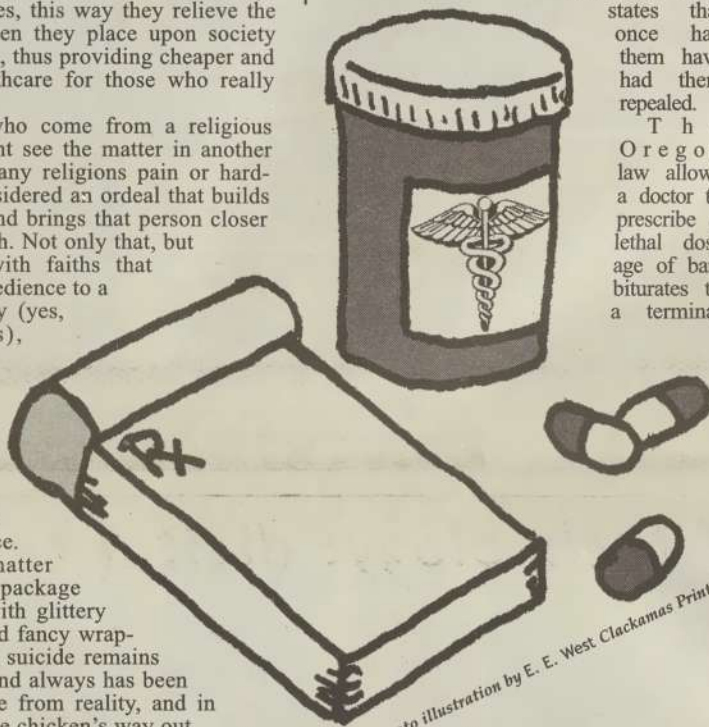


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Throwing caution to the river: building in floodplains a bad idea

Kyle Steele

In Tillamook County during the winter of 1996, 26 inches of rain were dumped during a 24-hour period, and continued for many more days than that.

The result was one of the worst disasters that I have ever witnessed in person. Cars were left in water that was up to their roofs, buildings were destroyed and many people lost their livelihood. Tillamook's livelihoood was to be put down because of diseases and injuries that befell the county.

The initial cost of the damage was estimated in the billions, but that didn't count the people who couldn't afford to

rebuild, or jobs that were lost for good because the companies didn't want to rebuild in such a violent and unpredictable location.

Many of these problems could have been avoided by not building in a floodplain below sea level.

Lately we have dealt with flooding locally and nationally, and much of the damage came from building in a space that is underwater for two to three months of the year.

During Hurricane Katrina the news mentioned that some parts of New Orleans were about 26 feet below sea level; not an ideal place to build a city. For a hundred years it was fine, but when the big one came along, the devastation caused by being so far below

the waterline was horrifying. Buildings were destroyed, families broken up and lives ended in this tragedy.

New Orleans shows what can, and with enough time, will happen in an area that is prone to flooding.

Building in a floodplain has always been a risk, but for some it's way too tempting of an offer, either because of the waterfront view or the low price that may come with the dangers of the area. All of the reasons people have for building in a floodplain don't mean a thing once they have nothing left.

In the end, building on higher ground will save money because most flood-damaged houses can never be used again. Building in a

higher area may be a little more expensive at first, but with the risk involved it is definitely the safest bet.

Being from the coast I've seen what can happen and the power that is involved, and it's a battle that none can win.

Floodplains are not the smartest place to build, but they can have many good uses for the environment, from starting new habitats for other animals, or creating new, richer soil to grow in.

Sometimes the best thing to do with a floodplain is to let it be, and see what happens with the land on its own. It

may even someday become a habitat for Oregon's favorite animals, ducks and beavers, but you can decide who you like the best.



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