Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

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God and Bioethics
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Definitions

Euthanasia is the intentional killing of a person whose life is felt not to be worth living.

Euthanasia can be voluntary, non-voluntary or involuntary.
Definitions

Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) is where the doctor prescribes a lethal medication, but the person administers the dose himself or herself.
Euthanasia does not include...

- Terminating or not initiating a medically useless treatment
- Proportionate pain and symptom treatment when the intention is not to kill but to care (double effect)
- Refusal of medical treatment by a competent patient
Arguments for Euthanasia

- **Compassion** - ‘*Death with Dignity*’

- **Autonomy** - ‘*Right to die*’

- **Economics** - ‘*alternatives too expensive*’
Compassion - death with dignity?

- Are the symptoms untreatable?
- Have all referral avenues been sought?
- Are the symptoms medical?
Autonomy - *a right to die*

- Rights for patients imply reciprocal duties for doctors
- Many ‘free’ requests for euthanasia are not freely made
- Autonomy is not absolute and rights must be balanced with responsibilities
- Rights granted to some undermine rights granted to others
Economics - we can’t afford it

‘As soon as he goes beyond 60-65 years of age man lives beyond his capacity to produce, and he costs society a lot of money...euthanasia will be one of the essential instruments of our future societies.’

(Jacques Attali, L'Avenir de la vie)
Arguments against euthanasia

- Unnecessary - *there are ethical alternatives*

- Dangerous - *exploitation and the slippery slope*

- Morally wrong - *contrary to all historical ethical codes*
Unnecessary - *use ethical alternatives*

- Palliative Care
- The Hospice Movement
- Psychosocial and Spiritual factors
Dangerous - *exploitation*

- Request as a symptom
- Request by coercion
- Perceived duty to request
- The slippery slope to involuntary euthanasia (Holland, Germany)
Slippery Slope requirements

- Favourable public opinion
- Willing doctors
- Economic pressure
- A law allowing it
Arguments against PAS

- It’s technically euthanasia by intention
- Places pressure on patients to request it
- Introduces a ‘slippery slope’ to euthanasia
- Involves problems with ‘completion’ (15%)
- Impossible to police
- Will undermine development of palliative care
Euthanasia in the Bible

- Abimelech - ‘death with dignity’
  (Judges 9:54-57)

- Saul – ‘put out of his agony’
  (2 Samuel 1:1-16)
Biblical Principles

- All human beings are made in the image of God (Gn 1:27)
- Taking the life of innocent human being is forbidden – even on request (Gn 9:6; Ex 20:13)
- Scripture only sanctions the killing of ‘guilty’ human beings in specific circumstances (capital punishment, holy war, self-defence)
- *Ratsach* and *Phoneuo* - (Ex 21:12-14; Lv 24:17-21; Nu 35:16-31; Dt 19:4-13)
Biblical Principles

- The third way between either allowing to die in pain or giving a lethal injection (John 8:1-11)

- Bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2)

- Carrying the cross – Christ-like compassion for the suffering

- Death is not the end – euthanasia could be the greatest spiritual disservice
The Law in the UK

- Suicide Act (1961)
  Assisting suicide is a crime

- Murder Act (1965)
  Intentional killing even for compassionate motives is a crime
Ethical Codes

- Hippocratic Oath (600BC)
- Judeo-Christian Ethic
- Declaration of Geneva (1948)
- International Code of Medical Ethics (1949)
- Statement of Marbella (1992)
Hippocratic Oath

I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked nor suggest such counsel’
23 Doctors at Nuremberg
Declaration of Geneva 1948

‘I will maintain the utmost respect from human life from the time of conception; even against threat I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity’
International Code of Medical Ethics
(1949)

‘a doctor must always bear in mind
the obligation of preserving human
life from the time of conception
until death’
Statement of Marbella (1992)

‘assisted suicide, like euthanasia is unethical and must be condemned by the medical profession’
The international scene

- US (Jack Kevorkian)
- Australia (Philip Nitschke)
- Holland
- Belgium
- Luxembourg
- Switzerland (Dignitas)
Netherlands - NVE is widespread

3,200 cases of VE
400 of PAS
900 of NVE
2,000 of palliation with Explicit intention of ending life (EIEL)
18,000 of wd/wh with EIEL
90 neonates, 2-5 psych pts
= >24,500 total with EIEL
(1995 figures)
Netherlands – Cases are underreported

Only 41% of 3,200 VE cases are reported
The so-called ‘strict safeguards’ have largely failed:

ie. VE only, prosecution for N-VE, No VE if palliative care available, all cases openly reported and properly scrutinised.
Oregon

- *Death with Dignity* Act passed 1997
- 401 deaths thus far in 11 years
- Most common reasons - loss of dignity (92%), autonomy and participation in enjoyable activities
- Less than 5% have psychiatric evaluations but one in six are depressed
- Reliance on doctors’ self-reporting
House of Lords’ Select Committee
Report  17 February 1994

- No change in the law to allow euthanasia
- Competent patients may refuse treatment
- Development of Palliative Care Services
- Research into pain relief and symptom control
- Treatment-limiting decisions *not* to be determined by resource availability
'We concluded that it was virtually impossible to ensure that all acts of euthanasia were truly voluntary and that any liberalisation of the law in the United Kingdom could not be abused. We were also concerned that vulnerable people - the elderly, lonely, sick or distressed - would feel pressure, whether real or imagined, to request early death.'

(Lord Walton of Detchant, February 1994)
Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Cases (1997-2006)

- Annie Lindsell
- Diane Pretty
- Reginald Crew
- Anne Turner
The Joffe Bill

- Three ‘Joffe’ Bills in three years
  - 2003-2005
- First ran out of time
- Second led to Lords’ Select Committee Reports
- Third came to the vote
The House of Lords’ Report (2005)

- 140 witnesses in four countries
- Over 60 formal written submissions
- Over 14,000 letters and e-mails
- 8 hour debate on report on 10 October 2005
- 74 Lords spoke – evenly divided
The 2006 Assisted Dying Bill

- Assisted suicide but not euthanasia
  - The ‘Oregon’ model with ‘Netherlands’ regulation
- England and Wales only
- Nurses’ involvement
- Worrying definitions
  - ‘terminally ill’, ‘unbearable suffering’
Bringing together...

- Human rights groups
- Professional groups
- Healthcare providers
- Faith based organisations
- Concerned individuals
Common Aims

- Promoting more and better care
- Opposing assisted dying
- Changing public opinion
Strategy

- **Website** – www.carenotkilling.org.uk
- **Slogan** – ‘Care Not Killing’
- **Resources** – leaflets/DVDs/papers
- **Spokespeople**
- **Evidence-based research**
Membership

- 18 Core organizations
- 30 Associate organizations
Core Members

- ALERT
- Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain & Ireland
- British Council of Disabled People
- CARE
- Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales
- Catholic Union
- Christian Medical Fellowship
- Church of England
- Evangelical Alliance
- Heythrop Insitute
- Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship
- LIFE
- RADAR
- Right to Life
- SPUC
The arguments

- Requests for euthanasia are extremely rare when patients needs fully met – therefore we need good palliative care

- A change in the law would place vulnerable people under pressure to request early death – therefore it should not be changed for a few persistent cases
The Early Campaign

- VES rebrands itself as Dignity in Dying – 23 January 2006
- Dr Anne Turner dies in Switzerland – 24 January 2006
- Care Not Killing officially launches – 30 January 2006
Anti-euthanasia alliance launched

A new alliance has been formed to promote palliative care, and oppose efforts to legalise euthanasia, or physician-assisted suicide.

Supporters of the Care Not Killing Alliance include health workers and human rights groups.

Top target will be a Bill currently under consideration by peers that would legalise physician-assisted suicide.
The early campaign

- www.carenotkilling.org.uk launched on 30 January 2006
- Over 500,000 leaflets printed and distributed
- Over 15,000 copies of the DVD ‘Doctors speak on assisted dying’ distributed
- Major Public debate between Dignity in Dying and Care Not Killing - 13 March 2006 (Panorama)
- MP Brian Iddon named as CNK chairman - 28 March 2006
Activity 2006

- Major letter writing campaign to Peers and MPs - April 2006

- 102,363 people in three weeks sign petition

- Major media campaign launched - 7 May 2006

- RCP reverses its position and opposes a change in the law - 10 May 2006
Friday 12 May 2006

- Patients, doctors and disabled people speak out on media against bill – 9-11 May 2006
- Faith leaders unite against bill
- Demonstrations outside parliament
- Peers turn out in force to oppose bill
- Bill defeated by 148-100 at 2nd reading on 12 May
BMA reverses position

- British Medical Association votes overwhelmingly to oppose euthanasia – 29 June 2006
- Against voluntary euthanasia – 65%
- Against physician assisted suicide – 65%
- Against non-voluntary euthanasia – 94%
The current position

- Joffe’s Bill has suffered an overwhelming defeat and the law remains unchanged.

- The medical profession is united against euthanasia and assisted suicide – RCGP, BMA and RCP all have reversed position in last 18 months to join WMA, RCN, APM and other royal colleges.

- Public opinion polls remain in favour of a change in the law although it depends what question you ask.
What has happened since?

- Dignity in Dying has regrouped – 12 staff and over £1million turnover
- New Cases to change public opinion
- New assaults on the law
The new threat

- VES (Dignity in Dying) growing in strength and confidence
- More well-funded court cases
- More high profile suicides
- More pressure on Parliament – PAS as part of ‘end of life care’
Dignity in Dying

- New CEO
  - Sarah Wootton
- >£1 million turnover
- Slick media machine
Dignity in Dying Spokespeople

- Debbie Purdy
- Edward Turner
- Sophie Pandit
- Lesley Close
- Brian Pretty
- Kelly Taylor
- Wyn Crew
Recent cases

- Craig Ewart
- Daniel James
- Peter and Penelope Duff
Other recent supportive figures

- Philip Nitschke
- Baroness Warnock
- Joan Bakewell
- John Humphrys
- Terry Pratchett
Debbie Purdy

- Primary progressive Multiple Sclerosis

- Seeking judicial review of DPP to refuse ‘clarifying’ Suicide Act

- High Court hearing lost

- Appeal Court hearing lost

- Appealing to House of Lords
Recent Events

- Sky Real Lives – Craig Ewart
- Panorama – Margot MacDonald
- A short stay in Switzerland – Ann Turner
Euthanasia – Current threats

- Assisted dying amendments to Coroners and Justice Bill
- Margo MacDonald’s End of Life Choices Bill
- Possible Private Members’ Bill in Lords or Commons
Coroners and Justice Bill

- First Reading – 14 January 2009
- Second Reading – 26 January 2009
- Committee – 3 February - 10 March 2009
- Third Reading – 24 March 2009
Coroners and Justice Bill

- **Clauses 46-48 tighten up Suicide Act 1961 to prevent ‘internet’ suicides**

- **Under the Suicide Act 1961 it is an offence to “aid, abet, counsel or procure” the suicide of another person**

- **The CJ Bill would make illegal “acts capable of encouraging or assisting suicide”**
Patricia Hewitt Amendment

- Exempting from prosecution acts “done solely or principally for the purpose of enabling or assisting a person to travel to a country or territory in which assisted dying is lawful”.

- Media circus 20 March

- Not reached at Report on 23 March
Hewitt Amendment Problems

- Scope to include non-terminally ill
- Elasticity of the term ‘assisted dying’
- Act would both encourage and discourage suicide
- Places British citizens at mercy of overseas law
- Vulnerable people placed under pressure
Hewitt Amendment Problems

- Current Swiss suicides not representative – we would see very different cases with law change

- Malicious encouragement vs compassionate help distinction spurious

- Establishment of precedent for assisted suicide

- Law is already working – ‘stern face and kind heart’ (justice and mercy)

- Danger of assisted suicide as ‘therapeutic option’
Coroners and Justice Bill
– Where to now?

- House of Commons – 26 January – 24 March 2009

- House of Lords – 27 April

- Royal Assent - ?Autumn 2009
‘End of Life Choices’ Bill Consultation

- Margo MacDonald MSP
- Consultation closed 8 March
- Report and draft bill awaited
- 18 signatures needed to proceed
- Until 2011 to complete process
Private Members’ Bills

- House of Commons
  (Evan Harris) – chance lost with ballot in December 2008

- House of Lords (Lord Warner) – not enough time left this parliamentary session
What can Christians do?

- Get informed
- Pray
- Join *Care Not Killing*
- Write letters to Peers - [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)
- Educate others – students and churches
- Get involved
What can Christians do?

- The key issue is availability and willingness to put your head above the parapet

- ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us?’ And I said ‘Here am I, send me!’ (Isaiah 6:8)

- Get involved