

Caring, Not Killing

Death is not a solution to the challenges of life.



THE DEBATE OVER ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

The debate over assisted suicide and euthanasia in America centers on a profound desire to see that people facing the end of life can do so with the assurance that their death will be humane and dignified. Michigan has gone to great lengths to make sure health care providers and patients are aware of pain management and hospice services available to them.

One way to honor a person's dignity is to provide a dignified means of living. Killing the patient, instead of the pain, is not dignified. Eliminating the one who suffers instead of the suffering is not compassion. Death does not have dignity, people do. Giving legal approval to suicide has far-reaching and grave implications for our society.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

• **What is euthanasia? What is assisted suicide?**

Euthanasia comes from the Greek words for "good" and "death." Euthanasia may be either active or passive, an action or omission in which the intent is to cause death. Assisted suicide is aiding or counselling someone to commit suicide.

- **Why do people ask to be killed?** Reasons range from fear of suffering, pain, hopelessness, lack of self-worth, depression, or especially not wanting to burden loved ones and family members.

- **How does euthanasia or assisted suicide occur?** Common methods include lethal injections, drug overdoses, suffocation, dehydration or starvation.

FACTS ABOUT EUTHANASIA & ASSISTED SUICIDE

- Belgium legalized euthanasia in 2002. There were 1,816 reported euthanasia deaths in 2013, a 27 percent increase from 2012.¹ Belgium legalized euthanizing children in 2014, though the practice was previously widespread. Half of all infants who died in Belgium's largest region in 1999-2000 were killed by doctors.²
- The Netherlands legalized euthanasia in 2002, but it was commonly practiced and not prosecuted for many years. There were 4,829 reported deaths from euthanasia in 2013, a 15 percent increase from 2012, and a 151 percent increase in seven years. Those numbers don't include death by withholding food or water from patients.³
- Oregon legalized assisted suicide in 2007. Recently Washington and Vermont legalized assisted suicide, and courts have forced legalization in Montana and New Mexico.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

- **Legalizing medical killing undermines patient autonomy.** When euthanasia is legalized, doctors and ethics committees are put in the role of deciding which patients will die. A 2007 sample of Belgian nurses found nearly half of those who participated in euthanasia did so without the patient's explicit consent.⁴
- **Euthanasia never stops with the terminally ill.** Recent high profile suicides include a double-killing of twins afraid of becoming deaf⁵ and a woman who was killed following a botched sex-change operation.

CANADA ALLOWS DEATH-ON-DEMAND

In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada legalized assisted suicide in *Carter v. Canada*. The judges rationalized throwing out Canada's protections for the vulnerable by saying that prohibiting assisted suicide violates the right to life of suicidal individuals by "forcing" them to commit suicide earlier than they planned. Canada not only embraced suicide for the terminally ill, but anyone with an "irremediable medical condition," theoretically including conditions like depression or deafness.



CONSEQUENCES CONTINUED

- **Embracing suicide encourages more suicide.** Suicide contagion is a recognized affect.⁷ Publicizing or glamorizing suicides can influence others to commit suicide. A CDC report shows suicides among men and women aged 35-64 increased 49 percent in Oregon from 1999 to 2010, compared to the national average of 28 percent.⁸

THINGS YOU CAN DO

1. Be informed, visit www.RTL.org to learn more about euthanasia and assisted suicide.
2. Appoint a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care to make sure your wishes are protected. A form can be downloaded from www.RTL.org.
3. Share this flyer with others. Flyers can be freely downloaded from www.RTL.org and copied.

*Individuals pictured are models and used for illustrative purposes only.

REFERENCES

- 1 - Simon Caldwell, "Five People Killed Every Day by Assisted Suicide in Belgium," *Daily Mail*, 28 May 2014. www.dailymail.co.uk
- 2 - David Rennie, "Half of Infant Deaths in Flanders Were Euthanasia," *The Telegraph*, 9 Apr. 2005. www.telegraph.co.uk
- 3 - Simon Caldwell, "Number of Mentally Ill Patients Killed by Euthanasia in Holland Trebles in a Year," *Daily Mail*, 3 October 2014. www.dailymail.co.uk
- 4 - E. Inghelbrecht et al., "The Role of Nurses in Physician-Assisted Deaths in Belgium," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 182, no. 9 (2010)
- 5 - Celeste McGovern, "Belgium's Slippery Slope: Lethal Injections for Deaf Twins Going Blind," *National Catholic Register*, 11 Feb. 2013. www.ncregister.com
- 6 - Bruno Waterfield, "Belgian Killed by Euthanasia After a Botched Sex Change Operation," *The Telegraph*, 1 Oct. 2013. www.telegraph.co.uk
- 7 - Margot Sanger-Katz, "The Science Behind Suicide Contagion," *The New York Times*, 13 Aug. 2014. www.nytimes.com
- 8 - E.M. Sullivan et al., "Suicide Among Adults Aged 35-64 Years — United States, 1999-2010," *MMWR* 62, no. 17 (Centers for Disease Control: 3 May 2013): 322-325.

Updated 2/20/15

