

Death with Dignity

A Release from Day to Day Torture

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Dialysis multiple times a week, handfuls of medication, abilities weakening, senses dulling, and constant pain; just a few things my mother deals with as one of many terminally ill patients here in this state. The Washington Death with Dignity Act allows terminally ill patients seeking to end their lives in a humane and dignified manner to request lethal doses of medication from medical and osteopathic physicians (Washington State Department of Health). Many people find this unethical, but I doubt any of them have experienced what these patients endure day to day.

Though I would not choose it, having a family member in a position where this could become an option helps me strongly support the act. Constant pain is something not many of us can even imagine. This isn't constant little aches. No this is all day, every day, body racking torture. Some would argue that patients receive "proper and effective regimes for pain relief." (Arch Bishop of Canterbury), yet there are terminally ill patients out there on morphine who are still in pain. The families of terminally ill patients need to be less selfish. Yes, admittedly it would be sad and painful to let family members go, but remember they are free and painless now. No longer do they have to suffer every day of their life, knowing that it's hopeless in the long run. I know if my mother ever truly considered it I would not want her to have to suffer, I would support her, no matter how hard it is for me.

People fear that the line between voluntarily ending a person's life and being coerced into choosing suicide will become blurred (Graham 297). However, the statistics show that not all terminally ill patients are jumping at the chance to end their life. In the first year the act was implemented only 63 patients requested and received medicine, of those only 47 individuals have died, and only 36 of the 47 actually ingested the medication. The report states that highest

concern of the patients who died was not the concern they would become a burden, but the loss of dignity and losing the ability to participate in activities that made their lives enjoyable (Washington State Department of Health). So for those who think that the “right to die is going to become the duty to die” (Archbishop of Canterbury), obviously not too many patients believe it is their duty.

This whole slippery slope idea is complete and utter nonsense. It's not like any random Joe off the street can walk into a hospital and request the medication to die. The process behind the Death with Dignity Act is extremely rigorous. First off the adult must be competent, a resident of Washington, and is determined by a physician and a consulting physician to be suffering from a terminal illness. Then, after voluntarily expressing their wish to die, patients may make a written request for medication to end their life. Oh, but they aren't done yet. Next, patients must have two witnesses voluntarily sign the written request. One of these witnesses can not be a relative of the patient entitled to any portion of the patient's estate or a person who works at a health care facility where the patient is receiving medical treatment or the patients attending physician. There are even more safeguards concerning the physician. The doctors must ensure that patients are making an informed decision by explaining to the patients their medical diagnosis, their prognosis, the potential risks associated with taking the medicine, the probable result of the medication, and their alternatives. Fifteen days after their first oral request and after they have made a written request, the patient must then again orally request the medication and at that point the physician will offer them a chance to rescind their request. All these, plus many more, rules and regulations melt away this whole slope idea. (Washington Death with Dignity Act)

