

Research paper on euthanasia ethical and moral issues

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Reported cases of suicide due to incurable diseases, commonly referred to as terminal illness, have been on the rise. Today, there are several terminal diseases that plague our community. Key among these terminal diseases includes cancer, AIDS and diabetes. Adult patients have always considered the option of terminating their lives so as to avert the suffering that comes with the disease. Some of the methods used by patients in performing suicide are either personally initiated or Physician-assisted suicides, commonly referred to as euthanasia. In all cases and laws according to most constitutions, it is illegal to end the life of a human being no matter the circumstances. However, there has been argument as to the legality with regard to taking the life of a terminally ill patient. Some medical experts argue that terminal diseases expose patients to long years of pain and suffering before they eventually die, which is not avertable. Additionally, such conditions are extremely medically expensive to attend as they use sophisticated hospital equipment. Thus both family and patient suffer financial and physical torment before the patient dies. In such cases, if a willing adult patient is convinced that early death will go a long way in averting these problems, then such a decision will be best implemented by a physician. On the other hand, opponents of suicide argue that the constitution recognizes the sanctity of life and no one has the right to end the life of another person. They also argue that the times shared between the patient and family is treasured and cannot be taken away.

In general therefore this debate has been raging on for several decades now. This research paper analyses the meaning of euthanasia and its implications. It also looks into the practicality of the process and arguments supporting its

legality. The paper will also provide the ethics and other social implications of the practice in the medical fraternity.

Definition of Euthanasia

The term euthanasia is used to refer to the intentional process taking of life through a painless means. Methods that can be used to implement euthanasia may either be through an act or initiation of a fatal process, or by omission, where care of the patient is withdrawn so as to end life. The word euthanasia is said to have been adopted from an ancient Greek language that bears the meaning “ dignified death” . While, the term used here may refer to a form of good death, there still abounds a strong debate as whether the death here is dignified.

There are two generally accepted modes of euthanasia. The first mode is referred to as active euthanasia where a physician takes effort and intention to end the life of a terminally ill patient. The second kind is referred to as passive euthanasia where the physician withdraws medical care with the intention of letting the patient die in the process. Proponents of euthanasia support the active mode this is due to the fact that patient will die almost immediately averting the pain and anguish of the underlying disease. On the other hand, passive euthanasia is supported by opponent of euthanasia claiming the patient dies of the underlying disease and not a form of suicide.

Ethical Issues

The first ethical issue that arises from euthanasia is the autonomy of the patient. The main argument in support of the practice is that every competent individual has the right to decide on the manner in which to live

life. That autonomy should also be extended to persons suffering from terminal conditions and therefore should control the timing and the manner of death they wish to face . Every person has the option to live quality life and avert any suffering and pain and be allowed to do so in a dignified manner. Thus terminally ill patients should be allowed to die in dignity without the need to face any anguish and that this autonomy must not be taken away from them.

Proponents of euthanasia further argue that the sanctity of life is dramatically reduced when an individual is diagnosed with a terminal disease . Such a life will be characterized by endless visits to the hospital and long hours of medical treatment and surgeries. The life of the patient will be reduced to a bed ridden life facing sympathies from friends and family. This anguish and pain is not worth going through while the end of the journey is certain, death.

Other ethical issues that persist is implicit in the fact that life has been prematurely ended due to desperation and hopelessness. However, in most cases Behuniak & Svenson (2003) argue that suicide is mostly performed under unstable mental conditions of the patient and therefore any suicide be stopped due to ethical reasons. In general, the medical fraternity assumes that persons who exhibit suicidal characteristics have their decision making capacity compromised. To these persons, physicians have the ethical responsibility of providing life sustaining medications and therapy . However, professional organizations and other bodies have differed when it comes to terminally ill patients and the ethical concerns pertaining to assisted suicide. Terminally ill patients exhibit normal character and are of

sound mind when making such a life threatening decision . Several states and countries have not been able to reach at a conclusive decision on the matter. While several states argue that any form of suicide is illegal, other nations such as Germany argue that every person has the right to end owns life and thus assisted suicide is not illegal .

Honesty for Proper Legislation

Some experts and medical practitioners acknowledge that physician suicide is widely practiced in the United States albeit in secret . The illegality of the practice puts any discussion of the issue in disarray and thus several legislative arms of leadership avoid the topic in totality. Legalizing the procedure would bring patients and physician to a common debate on the matter.

Furthermore legislation would bring forth public awareness and direction on how to handle Physician assisted suicide. It would also improve the national outlook in the manner citizens view the dignity of life and that according to Hawkins (2002) a life full of anguish and pain with no better form possible is not worth living. Even though such a life is not worth living, it should be ended in dignity and respect.

Legal Stances in Support of Physician Assisted Suicide.

The matter of euthanasia has been discussed and debated upon in the legal domain in the United States of America. Several courts and other judicial bodies have heard cases regarding physician assisted suicide however the outcomes have been quite varied. One such a debate has been on the Liberty Interest of the individual on the manner and time that a competent

terminally ill patient may choose to end life.

The United States Supreme Court and the Ninth Circuit have also expressed their opinion with regard to the same matter. The Ninth Circuit has expressed its view on the matter admitting that the personal dignity and autonomy is central to the every individual in the society . That one should be able to make decisions on how to live life. The court further appreciates that a terminally ill adult who has lived life to the fullest has a strong liberty in deciding how to end life on earth. In that any respected person of the society does not wish to live the twilight days of his life in a childlike state of helplessness and despair.

The Ninth Court, in expressing its opinion, looked to precedence in the United State Supreme Court in the 1990 cases of Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Dept. of Health in which the court held that a person had the right to refuse any life prolonging medication . The Supreme Court in a separate case also held that person has the right to determine the meaning and existence of life. These cases point to the idea that in as much as a court may value the sanctity of life, it is beyond the court to determine the course of an individual personal decision. It is also upon the court to respect the personal decision of sound competent persons with regard to their state of life.

Conclusion

Terminally ill patients face a huge predicament in how to live there last days. While some are willing to brave nature and face a slow death, others wish for faster and less painful methods. Physicians may assist such persons to end their lives by administering life ending medication to these patients. There

are many ethical reasons that are opposed to any physician assisted suicides. Similarly, there are several ethical reasons that support this procedure. Some of these ethical reasons include liberty interest, dignity in death, cost benefit analysis and proper legislation to guide the already prevalent practices. Additionally courts have not expressly decided that it is illegal simply providing guideline on the matter. In conclusion, legalizing Physician assisted suicide will go far in maintaining the dignity of the patient and other ethical aspect as discussed in this paper.

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