

Town Hall #6

11/12/19

Assisted Suicide

What is Physician Assisted Suicide?

- “Physician-assisted suicide occurs when a physician facilitates a patient’s death by providing the necessary means and/or information to enable the patient to perform the life-ending act (American Medical Association)”
- A patient makes the decision that they want to die, and seek medical professionals to make the process painless and smooth.
- Framed as a *treatment*.

Example:

- Christine Whaley with terminal Melanoma from California
- A few days before she died
- Wants to accomplish *“dying in a peaceful way, not in a painful way, not drowning in my own fluids not knowing when its coming, just a peaceful way.”*

In America:

- Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS) is illegal in most of America
- In California, PAS is legal if one is:
 - “18 years of age or older”
 - Resident of California
 - **Capable of making and communicating health care decisions for themselves**
 - **Diagnosed with a terminal illness that will lead to death within six months**
 - Physically and mentally capable of self-administering the aid-in-dying drug”

In Europe:

- In some European countries, physician assisted suicide laws are much looser than they are in America
- In Belgium, the law is “The patient is in a medically futile condition of constant and unbearable physical or mental suffering that can not be alleviated, resulting from a serious and incurable disorder caused by illness or accident...” (Belgian Act of Euthanasia)

Individual

- If someone is suffering unbearably, should it be their right to end their life with medical professionals?
- What is “unbearable?” Terminal illness vs. non-terminal?

The Government:

- Should the government be able to prevent someone from using assisted suicide to “treat” their unbearable suffering?
- Why?

In Belgium

- In Belgium, who is eligible for PAS is not based on a terminal diagnosis, rather a physician decides if assisted suicide is the best form of treatment for whatever their ailment is, not necessarily a terminal illness.

The *Physician's* Role

- What is the physician's role here?
- Are they properly “treating” the patient? Is this treatment?
- Are they possibly playing God?

Society and *Assisted-Suicide*

- How would legalized assisted-suicide affect society at large?
- If this becomes a normalized “treatment” or “route”: Will society become less willing to fund or support the terminally ill or incredibly sick?
- What does it mean for those who don’t want to pursue assisted suicide, but have terminal illness?

Societal Impact

- How would legalizing physician assisted suicide impact society?
- If people are doing it anyways, would it be in the interest of the state to make it legal so people can do it safely with a physician?
- Or would that lead to a place where people are taking advantage of the right, and creating a society in which suicide is a socially acceptable option?

Who's deciding?

- Without the deciding factor of “terminality,” we either trust the physicians, or the patient.
- Should the patient be able to say they are suffering enough? Can we accept their own testimony?
- Or should we totally trust physicians in being able to determine someone's suffering?