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The Ethics of Euthanasia

There are many ethical issues within the U.S. health care delivery system and one of the most debated is euthanasia. Euthanasia is the practice of ending one's life to relieve one of pain and suffering. There are different types such as active or passive and voluntary or involuntary. In active euthanasia, the physician directly causes the patient's death such as giving an injection, but in passive euthanasia, the physician just allows the patient to pass away by disconnecting a life-support machine, for example. Voluntary euthanasia involves the patient requesting to die, whereas involuntary euthanasia occurs when the patient does not request to die, but ends up being killed ("Forms of Euthanasia"). This ethical issue has raised many moral dilemmas and is very controversial. Those in favor of euthanasia believe that it should be legal because it relieves suffering, it is your personal freedom, and it is cost effective. However, those against this practice believe that it should not be allowed because it does not reflect the Hippocratic Oath, it is a slippery slope that could lead to involuntary killing, and it goes against some religious beliefs.

One of the main reasons that people want to allow euthanasia is to alleviate patients' pain and suffering. This can be either physical pain or deterioration due to cancer or other illnesses or it can be extreme suffering due to non-pain symptoms such as

Total Dependence Syndrome. Those supporting assisted suicide claim that even the best palliative care cannot control the pain endured by terminally ill patients and that 5-10% of them request euthanasia because it is intolerable (South Australia). Some claim that people also have a right to die. Dr. Alois Geiger states, “suicide is a human right but it is vital not just to have that right but to be able to exercise it, with dignity and without using brutal methods.” Supporters believe that the law should not stand in one’s way if the patient no longer wants to live. U.S. citizens are born with the right to life, which implies the right to death. Another reason that people believe that physician assisted suicide should be legal is because of the cost. The cost to euthanize a patient is miniscule compared to the cost of end of life care with treating patients and sustaining their lives. In 2011, Medicare spent about \$170 billion out of the \$554 billion total spending on patients’ last six months of life (“End-Of-Life Care”). From a market justice and economical point of view, allowing euthanasia would decrease healthcare spending and allocate resources in other needed areas.

Those against practicing euthanasia do not believe that it should be legal because it does not replicate the guidelines stated within the Hippocratic Oath. New physicians are required to swear upon this oath, which holds them accountable of professional ethical standards. The oath states, “I will do no harm or injustice to them...I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked” (“Greek Medicine”). According to this, physicians should not be allowed to euthanize patients by giving them drugs that will kill them. In the slippery slope argument, people worry that once a healthcare service starts killing patients, it could lead to a dangerous series of events. They are concerned that a society that allows voluntary euthanasia may eventually lead to involuntary euthanasia

("Arguments For and Against"). This slippery slope could lead society in the wrong direction and may corrupt the health care system. One other argument against assisted suicide is that it goes against some religious beliefs. In Christianity, the Bible teaches that God created humans in His image and that He is sovereign over life and death (Anderson). This suggests that every single person that He created is special and is valued to Him; so society should not devalue human life by terminating it. This also illustrates that humans should not play the role of God by determining who shall or shall not live and when one shall die, but let God be the ultimate decider who He puts to death and brings to life.

Both sides pose valid arguments pro euthanasia and anti euthanasia, which makes for such a controversial issue. This ethical dilemma has a small portion of the black and white end of the spectrum and a vast majority of the area grey. This is why I believe that this ethical issue must be handled according to specific situations. I do not think that there should be set standards to refer to when deciding whether to euthanize or not, but that all aspects of each separate situation be accounted for when making the decision. I do concede that from a market justice stance that euthanizing is a much more cost effective method and that physicians should practice it if they are capable of and are requested to, but I personally do not think that a patient's life has a price on it and I do not believe that I would be physically and mentally capable to end someone's life. This is primarily because of my religious views and my faith in Jesus Christ. I believe that since He so perfectly created us, that He shall perfectly take our lives away as well. For me personally, my faith is my top priority and it outweighs all of the other arguments, so I believe that if I were a physician, I would not practice euthanasia.

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