

THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) is so harmful, and it's such a threat to the well-being of so many people, that we want to be SURE that each and every person on our list knows what's happening. We have been told that the leadership will introduce a PAS bill early this session. A full public outcry NOW may show the Legislature that Hawaii cares about the lives of its elderly, poor, disabled, depressed, and chronically ill persons.

The Health Committee would normally hear a PAS bill, since such legalization would drastically affect doctors, nurses, patients, and medical practice in general. We have strong indications House leadership, led by Calvin Say, will AGAIN try to bypass the Health Committee for public hearings. This has been done for the past four years, even over the protests of the Health Committee members who rightly feel PAS is a health issue of great importance. This is not fair to the public who has a very large stake in this issue. PAS requires the most serious consideration by legislators who understand the risks to the practice of medicine and the impact PAS will have on our most vulnerable citizens.

A warning: PAS is usually called 'Death with Dignity' by its promoters to make the practice more acceptable to the general public. The term is deceptive because it presumes that assisted suicide is dignified. Suicide activists also use terms like Compassion and Autonomy to try to win people over without actually disclosing what is at stake. Those who argue for PAS use this terminology exclusively, rather than the more descriptive Physician Assisted Suicide.

Oregon legalized PAS 5 years ago and Oregon is already experiencing problems with the quality of their medical care...

A new study found that dying patients in Oregon are twice as likely to experience pain during their last week of life than they did prior to the passage of PAS. And families are less satisfied with the care their loved ones receive.

Most people requesting PAS and ultimately killing themselves say they feel they are becoming a burden or life is becoming a burden. Pain is not an issue in their decision, in spite of what advocates claimed when they campaigned to have the law passed in Oregon.

Coercion cannot be adequately assessed. Oregon law states that "coercion and undue influence on a patient to request lethal drugs" is a Class A felony. Two doctors refused a request for PAS by Kate Cheney, since it seemed to be the daughter's agenda, not the mother's. Yet a 3rd professional, a psychologist, approved PAS even though she noted Kate's "choices may be influenced by her family's wishes and her daughter may be somewhat coercive." What the Oregon law's advocates call "safeguards" were easily ignored and a woman died. Coercion, both overt and subtle, is an important problem with PAS that is ignored or discounted by pro-suicide activists.

PAS has set the stage for euthanasia. Although illegal, an Oregon doctor has already killed a patient with a lethal injection. The county district attorney never criminally prosecuted this case because he felt no conviction could be obtained with the pro-assisted suicide atmosphere in Oregon. There are other indications that patients were euthanized but the Oregon law does not allow for proper oversight and review, so much important information can only be pieced together after the fact.

One doctor notes that society should fear insurance carriers and HMOs that may find it cheaper to have patients die than to pay for their medical needs. The total Medicaid costs of two PAS deaths in Oregon was \$99; \$49.50 per death. PAS will drive good medical care away and substitute the cheapest solution.

Another doctor reports on the change in attitude. "In Oregon, life in its final stages has been devalued even for those individuals who do not want assisted suicide. People with serious illnesses are sometimes fearful of the motives of doctors or consultants. Only this week, a patient with metastatic cancer contacted me. She is concerned that an oncologist might be one of the 'death doctors.' She questions his motives. Such fears were never an issue before assisted suicide was legalized. Oregon, the so-called 'progressive' state has, in reality, regressed 2400 years to a confused time where physicians sometimes deliberately gave deadly poisons - even hemlock - to their patients."

Thank you very much for supporting all those who would be hurt by this seriously flawed legislation.

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