Euthanasia?The Right To Die Essay, Research Paper

Euthanasia…The Right To Die With Dignity

Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is a very sensitive issue debated in this country today. Euthanasia is the act of painlessly ending the life of a person for the reason of mercy. It is sometimes referred to as mercy killing. Americans are hearing more and more horror stories of the elderly tragically killing his or her spouse in order to avoid painful and horrible deaths. It is sad and amazing the extreme measures one has to go through to accomplish his or her death. More and more Americans are speaking out and fighting for the right to die. This however goes against all morals and ethical codes, for a physician’s role is to sustain life, not take it away. Although euthanasia and assisted suicide is not morally and ethically accepted, it should be an individual issue for those who face imminent death because death should be a personal choice, because death should be without unnecessary pain and suffering, and because most importantly death should be peaceful.

Granted, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide seem to threaten the traditional medical values. All physicians take the Hippocratic Oath upon receiving their degree. This oath states those physicians are to prolong life and minimize suffering. In an article written by John Glasson he argues:

Physician-assisted suicide presents one of the greatest contemporary

challenges to the medical profession’s ethical responsibilities. Proposed as a

means toward more humane care of the dying, assisted suicide threatens

the very core of the medical profession’s ethical integrity. (91)

Physicians have a moral and ethical responsibility to sustain life. They are in no

position to render aid in a person’s death. Groups argue that euthanasia and

physician-assisted suicide goes against everything they believe in. Although physicians lose patients to death everyday, it is not due to the fact that they aided in their death, but could no longer do anything to sustain life. Physicians have a moral obligation to uphold the Hippocratic Oath.

Although the above argument seems valid, however, in this case people have the right to make personal choices. Death should also be a personal choice to those who are terminally ill or debilitated with a degenerative disease that leaves them unable to care for themselves, and therefore having to depend totally on others to sustain their life. Our society makes it very difficult for those who want to end their life due to intolerable pain and suffering. The way in which a person chooses to die is a very personal issue. In his article an expert argues that ‘“ We feel people should make up their own minds and know all the options,”’ said Rev. Michael Bonacce, executive director for CID of Washington. ‘“We feel we were given free will and so we have to make the decision”’(qutd in Strasburg). In other words, we are given a free will and people should be able to make up their own minds. People should be educated and informed regarding the options available to them. Regardless of what options a person chooses, he or she should have the right to decide what is best for him or her. Arguments for the right to die are being heard in courtrooms all over

this country. People are speaking out for their personal rights. The following quote is an argument heard in the Supreme Court at a trial in 1998:

Fourteenth Amendment Due Process protects one’s right to make intimate

and personal choices, such as those relating to marriage, procreation, child

rearing—and the time and manner of one’s death. As the Ninth Circuit

observed , quoting from Planned Parenthood v. Casey: ‘Like the decision

[whether] to have an abortion, the decision how and when to die is one of

‘the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime,’

a choice ‘central to personal dignity and autonomy.’(48)

People have constitutional rights regarding other personal issues in their life, why should the death be treated with less respect? The attorney is arguing that if a person can choose to have an abortion, he or she may also have the personal choice of how and when to die. He is stating that this choice is central to a person’s dignity and independence. Laws in this country have changed over the years and will continue to change for many years to come. Activist for euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide will continue to fight for the freedom of choice. Hopefully people will begin to see the need for human compassion when it comes to the needs of the dying.

The most difficult aspect of death is watching a loved one die due to unnecessary pain and suffering. Our hospital’s intensive care units and nursing homes are filled with people dying and experiencing meaningless torment. When death is the only way to relieve suffering, why not allow it to come in the most humane way possible? There are organizations such as Hospice that have been very successful in helping people to die at home. Hospice provides the family and the patient with loving support and educates the family on the dying process. They also provide pain management and try to make the patient as comfortable as possible, however this is not enough. People still die with unnecessary pain and suffering (20). Barbara Dority, founding president of the Compassion in Dying states:

That’s why we still need to ask our doctors to end our lives when our pain

or deterioration has become unbearable. Physician-assisted suicide death

is the only possible solution for those patients experiencing unrelievable

pain or unbearable deterioration who plead with us as fellow human beings

to help them die. (20)

A physician’s help is still needed in order to die without pain. When a person is pleading for help due to unbearable pain, we are helpless and therefore unable to aid in his or her request. There is no reason for people to have to suffer such horrible deaths. Only a physician can provide the essentials to relieve a person of his or her needless pain and suffering. “We are not arguing for a limitlessly broad right to die. We seek to secure the right of mentally competent, terminally ill individuals to choose a death with dignity and without needless suffering”(20).

In this quote Barbara Dority is stating the importance of death with dignity and needless suffering. The fight for the right to die is an important issue; however, the fight for those who suffer needlessly is more important. It is considered ethical when a person dies of natural causes after a long fight with a terminal illness; however, if a person decides to take charge at the end of a long illness and chooses to die painlessly and quickly it is considered unethical. Prolonging one’s life is given a much higher value than the care and the needs of the dying.

The ultimate goal in death is to die peacefully. It would be a dream come true if we could all die in our sleep without pain and without suffering. In an article written by Dr. Christina M. Puchalski she states:

In encouraging people to fight to the end, we neglect to give them the

opportunity to bring closure to their lives; to complete unfinished goals;

to forgive those they had conflicts with, to be forgiven; to make peace with

themselves, with God; to say good-bye; and to die with dignity. (35)

Sometimes when putting up a strong and endless fight to the end, we forget what is really important. In order to attain a peaceful death one must make peace with his or her life. When the end is near people must have some sort of closure to their life. If possible, people need to die at home surrounded by their loved ones. They need to be able to express all of their feelings and make peace, not only with themselves but those around them. So many times people die without being able to do these things. Many people die alone with extreme physical pain and mental suffering. How can this be legal? Dr. Puchalski informs us:

Spiritual support is essential in the care of the dying. We need to help foster

hope, love, and contentment with their lives in the final days of living.

We need to provide an environment where people can be still, pray, laugh,

cry, hold, and be held as they are dying. (37)

Dr. Puchalski, therefore, is talking about human compassion and providing the dying with a sense of peace and security. The dying need to express emotions whether good or bad and because they are human we need to treat them with the same respect as the living. Sometimes people hold onto life and won’t let go until they have reached a point when they feel it is safe. We need to provide the dying with realistic choices that should be available to everyone. Sadness that surrounds death needs to be replaced with peacefulness.

Although euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide threatens the medical profession, we need to change our way of thinking and consider the needs of the dying. Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is an issue that has opened the eyes of many Americans. People will continue to fight for the right-to-die, especially for those who are terminally ill or debilitated with a degenerative disease. People should be able to make their own decisions regarding their death. Yes, physicians are obligated to the Hippocratic Oath, however; we as loving compassionate human beings should be obligated to fulfill the needs of the dying and treat death with as much respect as we do living. We have a moral obligation to those whom are dying with unnecessary pain and suffering. We have a right to die with dignity.

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