

Euthanasia: What Happens Next?

In trying to support that which is dignified and honourable, assisted suicide advocates may find themselves facing greater moral issues than they counted on, says Corlett Novis.

The act of killing a suffering individual has, primarily, the most virtuous of intentions. It can bring relief to the pained, dignity to the miserable and mercy to the hopeless. But it only takes a bit of neglect for a patient to start feeling pressured into making decisions. With this in mind, how will such a delicate matter be treated if permitted by the law? And what happens if it isn't used responsibly?

Euthanasia is already legal in several different countries and American states, which the media constantly draws on for material. No doubt you have read or seen one of the many bittersweet stories of assisted suicide on the news or in the papers. But this seemingly extrinsic practice may very well play a role in the future of the UK as well. A recent survey by the BBC found that 70% of religious Britons, the people most often credited to be opposing assisted suicide, would support legal euthanasia and only 16% would oppose it, making assisted suicide in Britain a serious possibility.



But what happens if euthanasia becomes legal in the UK? In ideal medical practice, patients will be informed by their doctor about implications beforehand, and the doctor or a social worker

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will speak to the patient about multiple treatment options without bias. If this system was dependable then, of course, there wouldn't be a problem. But Dr. Angelo Volandes, an American physician, claimed in an interview with the Atlantic that "people [are] getting medical interventions that, if they were more informed, they would not want". This thoughtless medical care isn't unique to the US by any means, it exists in the UK as well. "Careless", "insincere" and "unclear" communication has fuelled a surge in complaints against the NHS in England' according to an article by the BBC two years

ago involving an NHS ombudsman who received 16,333 complaints between the years 2011 and 2012.

I'd like to point out that I'm not just criticizing the healthcare system which is, in actuality, one of the best in the world, but rather I'm trying to point out some human shortcomings within it. After all, to assume that it is only the drastically ill who will seek death in this way is as fanciful as it is false. In a time where economic rationalism is dominant, it is easy to envision a time where euthanasia could be viewed as a more rational and financially feasible alternative to intensive support for doctors, patients and taxpayers. Even with the moral side to this story aside, mercy killing is a delicate matter to say the least, and people require a detailed understanding of its consequences, or euthanasia becomes a downwards spiral legalising suicide for the disabled, the mentally unstable, and the unwanted.

It seems that amidst the disputes concerning ethics of euthanasia we have forgotten to look to the future and entertain the possible difficulties we may face in legalising it. Should euthanasia be degraded into economic stinginess, then we will have invented a means of pressurized self-purging, rather than a means of retaining dignity. Of course, even with heavy restrictions the more wealthy will still seek out treatment, as they do now, in other more lenient countries, but we need to remember that these instances are few and far between and in most cases the NHS will be directly involved in cases involving euthanasia.

Despite its many merits, the healthcare system can fall short at times when it comes to communication. Euthanasia is going to become a serious possibility in the future of the UK and we need to take into account the importance of clear, concise discussions between doctors and patients before we even consider legalizing it.

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Euthanasiaandassistedsuicide/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.abc.net.au/rampup/articles/2013/01/21/3673497.htm>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/node/137917>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/05/how-not-to-die/309277/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22362736>

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