

On Health Care Decisions

This insert is meant to supply some facts, addresses and references for my sermon on July 8.

NB. “Euthanasia” or “mercy killing” generally refers to the killing of a sick man independent of his will. “Assisted suicide” refers to the killing of a sick man in accord with his will.

1. The International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (ITF) is the best source of up-to-date information on the two topics included in their title. Their goal is to make certain that a patient’s right to receive care and compassion is not replaced by a doctor’s right to prescribe poison or administer a lethal injection.
 2. Their information is accurate and well documented. They have resources on Assisted Suicide, “artificial feeding,” euthanasia, how to get the pain control you or another needs, and their library, the Frank Reed Memorial Library, maintains the most extensive collection in the world of books, periodicals, newspaper and professional journal articles devoted to euthanasia, assisted suicide and end-of-life issues.
 3. They also have a center for law and bioethics, which provides assistance to attorneys and those involved in the field of bioethics.
 4. Their website is: www.internationaltaskforce.org, with quite a good number of links and relevant articles, updated frequently.
 5. Three packets with information on the Protective Medical Decisions Document (PMDD) may be found in the parish hall. Next to them is a sign up sheet for those who would like such a packet, and how many. If we order them in bulk, they are cheaper.
 6. Here are some of the reasons why a PMDD is necessary:
 - a. Federal regulations require every hospital and health program that receives any Medicare or Medicaid funds to inform you, upon admission, of your rights regarding an advance directive. As a result, many facilities are giving patients an advance directive such as a Living Will or Power of Attorney for Health Care to sign at the time of admission—which is a poor time to take care of such things—given the stress and pain which you might be under.
 - b. Many hospitals are instituting “futile care” guidelines that may preclude the wishes of a patient that is unable to communicate. The PMDD specifically states that the meaning of “futile” is left to your agent who knows your values and wishes.
 - c. An effort is underway across the country to add euthanasia and assisted suicide to the end of life options. The PMDD specifically prohibits euthanasia and assisted suicide.
 - d. Previously, family members were automatically considered the decision makers for a loved one. This is rapidly changing. Unless you have named someone as your agent to make decisions for you if you can’t give informed consent, a health care provider might have the authority to make critical decisions for you.
 - e. Ever since the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) went into effect, some health facilities have refused to provide information to anyone—even close family members—about the hospitalized patient, unless the patient has given written consent. The PMDD give your agent the authority to obtain necessary information in the event that you are unable to give written consent at the time of the hospitalization.
 7. The following states have or will have considered euthanasia and assisted suicide measures in 2007: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin. Oregon already has a law in place permitting assisted suicide. Great efforts are being made to place a similar measure to Oregon’s on the docket for the Washington state legislature. The initiative is being lead by its former governor.
 8. So far, none of the initiatives in this country have included babies or children as candidates for euthanasia. But in 2004, the prestigious medical society of Holland (KNMG) urged the government’s Health ministry to review euthanasia procedures for “those who have no free will.” This would include babies, children, people with mental retardation, or those who had suffered brain damage from accidents.
 9. Currently, euthanasia is a “medical treatment” in Holland and Belgium. Professor Len Doyal, a former member of the British Medical Association, called for doctors in England to end the lives of some of their patients “swiftly, humanely, and without guilt.” England will likely pass an assisted suicide bill before too long, making Doyal’s proposal seem too radical, and theirs more mainstream.
 10. Currently, Oregon law does not require family members to know that a loved one is planning suicide with a doctor’s help.
- These are just a few of the facts available on ITF’s website. I pray that all my parishioners would be informed about these things, and do what they can to stop these initiatives at least in our country; initiatives which to me seem indistinguishable from those of the Nazi party in 1930’s Germany.