

Exposing Vulnerable People to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

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Exposing Vulnerable People

- ❧ Euthanasia is an action or omission of an action which of itself and by intention causes the death of a person for the purpose of relieving suffering.
- ❧ Euthanasia is the direct and intentional cause of death.
- ❧ It is usually done by lethal injection.
- ❧ Euthanasia is a type of homicide that only differs from common homicide in its intention to relieve suffering.
- ❧ Euthanasia is often referred to as “Mercy Killing.

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⌘ **Euthanasia is not:**

- ⌘ Withholding or withdrawing medical treatment that is useless (futile) burdensome or extra-ordinary.
- ⌘ The proper use of large doses of pain killing drugs to relieve suffering.
- ⌘ The proper use of sedating a person with a regimen of drugs to relieve the suffering of a person.

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- ⌘ We need to be clear about euthanasia and assisted suicide.
- ⌘ Many bio-ethicists believe that removing life-sustaining medical treatment and euthanasia/assisted suicide are morally equivalent.
- ⌘ Peter Singer says that there is no difference between killing and letting die.
- ⌘ **This is a modern fallacy.**
- ⌘ **There is a difference between killing and letting die.**

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- ⌘ We need to properly define what assisted suicide is.
- ⌘ Assisted suicide is not “Aid in Dying,” palliative care is aid in dying. Aid in Dying is a euphemism created by the euthanasia lobby.
- ⌘ Assisted suicide is when one person is directly and intentionally involved with ending the life of another person.
- ⌘ To aid, encourage or counsel suicide.

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- ❧ Bill 52 decriminalizes euthanasia, but not assisted suicide . It is similar to the Belgian euthanasia law.
- ❧ It defines end-of-life care as including “Medical Aid in Dying” which is a euphemism for euthanasia.
- ❧ It creates a right to end-of-life care, which would also mean “a right to euthanasia.”
- ❧ It is not limited to terminal illness, you need to be suffering physically or psychologically or have an “incurable serious illness.”

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❧ Marc & Eddy Verbessem were deaf since birth. They were not physically sick but they were slowly becoming blind.

❧ On December 14, 2012; the identical twins died by euthanasia in Belgium.

❧ They lived together all of their lives and they were afraid of becoming dependent on others.

❧ Was euthanasia the right decision?



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- ❧ An October 2013 Dutch news story reported that a woman was euthanized because she feared becoming blind.
- ❧ She was obsessed with cleanliness and said that she couldn't live without being able to clean the spots on her clothes.



Exposing Vulnerable People

- ❧ In October 2013; a Dutch woman was euthanized because she feared becoming blind.
- ❧ She was obsessed with cleanliness and said that she couldn't live without being able to clean the spots off her clothes.
- ❧ This is my friend Amy Hasbrouck.
- ❧ She is the leader of a disability group.
- ❧ Does euthanasia for being blind people effect attitudes towards Amy Hasbrouck?



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- ❧ Ann G was a 44 year-old Belgian woman who lived with Anorexia Nervosa.
- ❧ She went to Dr. Vandereycken, a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of Anorexia.
- ❧ Ann accused Vandereycken of sexually exploiting her and several other patients.
- ❧ Ann was upset and said that her psychological pain was unbearable and she wanted to die.
- ❧ Ann died by euthanasia in 2012 and Vandereycken is seeing patients again.



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- ⌘ Dr Tom Mortier is a chemistry professor in Belgium.
- ⌘ His mother, Lieve De Troyer lived with chronic depression.
- ⌘ She was widowed years earlier. She asked for euthanasia after experiencing a breakup in a long-term relationship that.
- ⌘ On April 19, 2012 Lieve died by euthanasia with the recommendation of one psychiatrist.



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- ❧ Dr Charles Bentz is a doctor in Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal.
- ❧ Bentz had a 76 year-old long term patient who became depressed after being diagnosed with cancer.
- ❧ Bentz referred his patient to a cancer specialist who called Bentz to provide the “second opinion” for his patient to die by assisted suicide.
- ❧ Bentz said that his patient did not qualify because he was depressed. His patient died by assisted suicide 15 days later.



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- ❧ Barbara Wagner lived in Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal. Wagner had recurrent lung cancer.
- ❧ Her physician prescribed an aggressive cancer treatment.
- ❧ Wagner was dependent on the state health plan that sent her a letter denying her medical treatment but offering her assisted suicide.
- ❧ “To say to someone, we’ll pay for you to die, but not pay for you to live, it’s cruel,” she said.



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❧ In 2000, I was diagnosed with cancer and told that I had six months to a year to live. I knew that our law had passed and I wanted assisted suicide. I did not want to suffer, and I did not want radiation. I wanted my doctor to help me, but he didn't really answer me. Instead, he encouraged me to not give up and ultimately I decided to fight the cancer. I had both radiation and chemotherapy.

❧ **I am so happy to be alive!** It is now 12 years later. If my doctor had believed in assisted suicide, I would be dead. I thank him and all my doctors for helping me choose “life with dignity.”

❧ Jeannette Hall, letter to the editor – Nov 28, 2012.



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- ✧ Justice Smith decided in the Carter court decision that:
- ✧ The assisted suicide law was unconstitutional because it denied people with disabilities equality under the law.
- ✧ A limited form of euthanasia needed to be legalized to allow people, who are unable to die by assisted suicide, to have equality to an “assisted death.”
- ✧ The federal government had until June 15, 2013 to decriminalize euthanasia and assisted suicide.
- ✧ Gloria Taylor had a constitutional exemption to die by euthanasia and assisted suicide.

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- ⌘ **Physician-assisted deaths under the euthanasia law in Belgium: a population-based survey.** Chambaere, Kenneth, et al. (CMAJ, June 15, 2010)
- ⌘ This study sent a five page questionnaire to physicians based on 6927 deaths in Flanders Belgium.
- ⌘ Of the 3,623 responses, the researchers identified that there were 137 euthanasia deaths, 5 assisted suicide deaths and 66 assisted deaths without explicit request. There were 208 assisted deaths with 66 (32%) of the assisted deaths done without explicit request.

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- ❧ Euthanasia deaths without explicit request.
- ❧ *the patient was comatose (70.1% of the cases) or had dementia (21.1% of the cases)*
- ❧ Some of the reasons physicians euthanized the patient without request: 17% the physician thought it was in the best interest of the patient, 8.2% the physician thought the discussion would have been harmful .
- ❧ nurses were more often involved in the administration of the drugs with euthanasia without explicit request

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- ❧ *the use of life-ending drugs without an explicit patient request often involved patients with diseases other than cancer, which have an unpredictable end-of-life trajectory.*
- ❧ *Our finding that the use of life-ending drugs without explicit patient request occurred predominantly in hospital and among patients 80 years or older who were mostly in coma or had dementia fits the description of “vulnerable” patient groups at risk of life-ending without request.” Chambaere, Kenneth, et al. 899.*

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Justice Smith stated:

“Finally, I note that Professor Deliens was asked about the comment in the Chambaere et al. Population Study that “the use of life-ending drugs without explicit patient request occurred predominantly in hospital and among patients 80 years or older who were mostly in a coma or had dementia and fits the description of ‘vulnerable’ patient groups at risk of life ending without request”.

Smith, Justice Lynn. "Carter v. Canada (Attorney General), 2012 BCSC 886.", 576.

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- ❧ *“His responses to this line of questioning suggested that possibly he did not wish to admit that he had said that patients who are 80 years or older are vulnerable and at risk of LAWER. I take into account that Professor Deliens was ill, and was being cross-examined by videolink, in English (not his first language). Perhaps for those reasons, or perhaps because of a lack of impartiality, his responses in this one area did not seem wholly straightforward.”*
- ❧ Smith, Justice Lynn. "Carter v. Canada (Attorney General), 2012 BCSC 886.", p 577.

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- ❧ **The role of nurses in physician-assisted deaths in Belgium.** Inghelbrecht, Els, et al. (CMAJ June 15, 2010).
- ❧ Questionnaires were sent to 1678 nurses with 1265 responses being completed correctly.
- ❧ 248 nurses reported that the last patient in their care died by euthanasia. Almost half (120 nurses or 45%) reported that the last patient in their care died by euthanasia without explicit request.
- ❧ 14 of the cases, the nurse admitted to injecting the patient, which is illegal in Belgium.

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- ❧ People who died by euthanasia without explicit request, were more likely to be **over the age of 80** and **die in a hospital**, and were less likely to have had cancer.
- ❧ *“It seems that the current law (which does not allow nurses to administer the life-ending drugs) and a control system **does not prevent nurses from administering life-ending drugs.**”*
- ❧ Inghelbrecht, Els, et al., 909.

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- ❧ **Reporting of euthanasia in medical practice in Flanders Belgium: cross sectional analysis of reported and unreported cases.** Smets, Tinne, et al. (BMJ October 2010)
- ❧ Based on the responses from the 3,623 questionnaires the study concluded that 52.8% of the euthanasia deaths in the Flanders region of Belgium were reported, while 47.2% of the euthanasia death were unreported.

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- ❧ *there was a significant relation between reporting of euthanasia and the patient's age, with deaths of patients aged 80 years or older reported significantly less often than deaths of younger patients.*
- ❧ This means that the legal requirement for requesting euthanasia were met 73.1% of the time when the euthanasia death was reported. The legal requirements were met 12.3% of the time when the euthanasia death was unreported.

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- ❧ *This association was also found in the Netherlands, where the most important reason for not consulting was that the physician did not intend to report the case. Physicians who intend to report a case seem to consult another physician and comply with the other requirements of the law, whereas physicians who do not intend to report a case appear to consult a physician only when they felt the need for the opinion of a colleague.*
- ❧ *legislation alone does not seem sufficient to reach the goal of transparency (“total” or a 100% transparency seems to be a rather utopian ideal) .*

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- ⌘ August 2005 a study by van der Lee, et al found that people who were experiencing signs of depression were more likely to request euthanasia. Journal of Clinical Oncology 23:6607-6612, 2005
- ⌘ Van der Lee stated: “their clinical impression was that requests for euthanasia were based on well-considered decisions and not depression in the Netherlands.”

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- ❧ The van der lee study concluded:
- ❧ “To our surprise we found that a depressed mood was associated with more requests.” – “Patients with a depressed mood were associated with a four times’ greater risk of requesting euthanasia.”
- ❧ Depression is a primary risk factor for requests for euthanasia and assisted suicide.

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- ❧ In October 2008, Linda Ganzini released a study in Oregon that showed that 15 of 58 (26%) people in her study who had requested assisted suicide were depressed.
- ❧ In 2013 – the 71 people who died by assisted suicide, only two of them were offered a psychological assessment.
- ❧ Oregon's statistics for the last four years show that only 2 percent of patients are being referred for psychological evaluations.

Exposing Vulnerable People

- ❧ Trends in end-of-life practices before and after the enactment of the euthanasia law in the Netherlands from 1990 to 2010: a repeated cross-sectional survey. Onwuteaka-Philipsen, Bregje D, et al. Lancet July, 2012.
- ❧ The percentage of unreported euthanasia deaths increased from 20% in 2005 to 23% in 2010.
- ❧ The reported euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands: 2006 – 1923, 2007 – 2120, 2008 – 2331, 2009 – 2636, 2010 – 3136, 2011 – 3695, 2012 – 4088, 2013 - 4829. These stats don't include the unreported euthanasia deaths.

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- ❧ The 2013 Netherlands euthanasia statistics also indicated that there were 42 euthanasia deaths of people with psychiatric problems and 97 euthanasia deaths of people with dementia.
- ❧ The Dutch Medical Association extended euthanasia to babies born with disabilities in 2005 and they are now discussing euthanasia for children. They are also talking about forcing doctors to refer for euthanasia.
- ❧ I thought that this was about choice & autonomy?

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- Recent euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands.
- An article [published by DutchNews.nl](#) explained that the euthanasia clinic was reprimanded for the death of an elderly woman, who had a stroke and died by euthanasia because she didn't want to live in a nursing home. **It sounds like elder abuse to me.**
- A 35 year-old woman with psychiatric issues died by euthanasia on December 19, 2012; after two psychiatrists refused to kill her.

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- ❧ Recent euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands.
- ❧ A 54 year-old healthy woman with a personality disorder, eating disorder and a chronic obsessive-compulsive neurosis died by euthanasia.
- ❧ A physically healthy 63 year-old man who was working for a government institution, never had a relationship and the only thing he did his whole life was work. He was retiring and depressed. He died by euthanasia based on psychological suffering.

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- ❧ The 2013 Belgian euthanasia report indicates that the number of reported euthanasia deaths in Belgium increased by 26.8% in 2013 to 1816 reported deaths.
- ❧ At the same time Belgium has recently extended euthanasia to children. The child euthanasia bill was passed after protests against the bill were held in Brussels and 160 Belgian Paediatricians denounced the child euthanasia bill.

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- Recent euthanasia deaths in Belgium.
- Healthy elderly couple died by euthanasia .
- Their son, John Paul, 55, approached their doctor to request their euthanasia – but the doctor refused because there were no grounds for it. John Paul found another doctor willing to perform the killings in an unnamed hospital in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium in which 82 per cent of euthanasia cases are performed.
- John Paul said the double euthanasia of his parents was the ‘best solution’. ‘If one of them should die, the one who would remain would be so sad and totally dependent on us,’

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- ❧ Recent euthanasia deaths in Belgium.
- ❧ In September, Frank van den Bleeken, who was convicted of rape and murder in Belgium, was approved for euthanasia for reasons of psychological suffering.
- ❧ van den Bleeken is the first Belgian prisoner, **who is not terminally ill**, to be approved to die by euthanasia.
- ❧ Another Belgian prisoner, who has currently served 27 years for murdering 2 people, has also asked to die by euthanasia.
- ❧ Capital punishment was outlawed in Belgium.

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- ✧ In November 2013, I debated Dr Jan Bernheim, one of the pioneers of the Belgian euthanasia law. During the debate in Brussels I quoted from the Belgian studies showing that euthanasia deaths were occurring without request, that euthanasia deaths were not being reported and that nurses were ignoring the law and euthanizing their patients.
- ✧ Bernheim responded to those statements by saying:
 - ✧ "There are problems with the Belgian euthanasia law."
 - ✧ I responded by saying:
 - ✧ "That is cold comfort for the dead."

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- ❧ Recent assisted suicide deaths in Switzerland
- ❧ In April 2013, Pietro D'Amico, a 62-year-old magistrate from Calabria in southern Italy died by assisted suicide.
- ❧ His autopsy proved that he had a wrong diagnosis and he wasn't terminally ill.
- ❧ In February 2014 Oriella Cazzanello, 85, travelled to the Dignitas suicide clinic in Basel, Switzerland, where she paid €10,000 for an assisted suicide because was unhappy about how she looked.

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- Malphurs & Cohen study published on spousal homicide-suicide. *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry* 13: 211-217, March 2005.
- Malphurs and Cohen are experts on suicide. They researched the problem of murder/suicide in Florida.
- Many of these cases were reported as a loving couple where one spouse kills the other spouse for reasons of “compassion.”
- The study found that in nearly all of these cases the spouse who does the act usually had a history of abuse and resistance marks were usually found on the victim.

Exposing Vulnerable People

- ⌘ **Keys to Winning the battle:**
- ⌘ **Focus on the likely victims.** You need people with disabilities to be spokespeople.
- ⌘ **Focus on Elder Abuse.** Choice is an illusion, especially in the context of abuse.
- ⌘ **Work with people from all points of view.**
- ⌘ **Be clear about what it is.** We lose when there is confusion.

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