

## PERILS OF QUEBEC EUTHANASIA REPORT

*Alex Schadenberg, Executive Director, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition in the National Post - March 28:*

On March 22, the Quebec government's Dying with Dignity Commission released its recommendations concerning euthanasia and palliative care. The media reported that the commission recommended the legalization of assisted suicide in exceptional cases.

In fact, the commission recommends that euthanasia - but not assisted suicide - be legalized in Quebec. The commission's recommendations are similar to Belgian-style euthanasia, which is not limited to exceptional cases.

The first half of the report contains recommendations for improving palliative care, including the need for greater public awareness of the full

*See Quebec page 4...*



## GLOBAL NEWS ADVOCATES EUTHANASIA FOR DISABLED

### COUNCIL OF CANADIANS WITH DISABILITIES (CCD) RESPONDS

*On March 16, the Global News show 16x9 featured Robert Latimer (who killed his daughter Tracy in 1993), Annette Corriveau (who wants her two adult children with disabilities to be euthanized) and pro-euthanasia "ethicist" Arthur Schaefer. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities responded with the following to Global News:*

Your TV show "Taking Mercy" (March 16, 2012) has left many Canadians in a state of shock. The entire program was filled with misinformation, fear, and stigma.

Those of us who live with disabilities could easily have shared hospital rooms, support services or classrooms with Tracy Latimer and other children like her who have been murdered by their parents. When we hear ourselves categorized as having lives that are only worthy of death, we are reminded how segments of our society - represented by your show - don't think we belong.

Some of us who are now adults vividly recall the nightmare we had as children when another child like us, Tracy Latimer, was killed by her father. That nightmare was only intensified when we watched so many Canadians express sympathy for the killer rather than the victim.

Your guests, including parent Robert Latimer and "ethicist" Arthur Schaefer

only feed into the existential nightmare we face because they perpetuate the idea that it is better to be dead than disabled.

We don't understand how you could frame the justification for murdering persons with disabilities using a term like "mercy." Our existence should not be dependent on someone else's subjective measurement of our worthiness.

When you reduce the powerful and purposeful lives of persons with disabilities by using trite comments likening our existence to that of pets, plants, mere burdens or simplified stereotypes, you portray us as subhuman.

Where were the voices of citizens living with significant disabilities? Where were the voices of family members and advocates who see accommodation and inclusion as appropriate responses to supporting persons with disabilities?

Your show and your blog shut us out. For what other marginalized groups have you gone forward with a panel discussion that doesn't include anyone from that group?

We challenge Global, in the name of journalistic balance, to stage a follow-up episode featuring persons with disabilities who want to live and who see a danger in opening up the debate on euthanasia. Only good can come from providing an opportunity for a broader, fairer public discourse.

## QUEBEC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY REPORT: A PRO-EUTHANASIA MANIFESTO?

Before society responds affirmatively to the call in your March 14 editorial (“Assisted dying: it’s time for a discussion”), we will need to provide the public with a full and open explanation of the case against legalizing euthanasia. The recent Quebec National Assembly Dying with Dignity report fails to do that. Like the previous report of the Expert Panel of the Royal Society of Canada on this same subject, the Quebec report is not balanced and reads rather like a pro-euthanasia manifesto. The fact that it strongly recommends palliative care does not negate that characterization. The authors of the Quebec Report:

- take a purely utilitarian approach to the euthanasia question. In the committee’s estimation, legalizing euthanasia will do more good than harm – and that justifies allowing it.
- hold individuals’ rights to autonomy and self-determination as the overriding values, citing, among other examples, the current approach to abortion as showing this value predominates in contemporary Quebec society.
- conclude that legalizing euthanasia will not harm the value of respect for life because euthanasia will only be used in exceptional circumstances and there will be very few cases.
- claims that “The value of the sanctity of life has undergone a significant transformation” relative to other values, which means that now respect for life itself doesn’t necessarily take priority.
- argue that allowing euthanasia is merely an incremental change – we all agree with palliative care and so, it says, “aide médicale à mourir” (euthanasia) needs to be seen as just another “palliative-care option.”

How should we respond to these arguments?

First, many people who oppose legalizing euthanasia do so because they believe it’s inherently wrong to kill another person, except when that is the only way in which to protect innocent human life. Euthanasia does not fall within this exception and, therefore, for many people, can never be ethically justified. The clash of values involved in the euthanasia debate is between respect for life on the other hand and individuals’ rights to autonomy and self-determination on the other. People who reject euthanasia give priority to respect for life; people who support euthanasia give priority to autonomy and self-determination.

“Respect for life” must be upheld at two levels: respect for each individual human life and respect for human life in general. The latter requirement is the reason that the consent of an individual to being euthanized is not sufficient to avoid damaging the value of respect for life. Authorizing doctors to kill their patients necessarily contravenes respect for human life in general. Legalizing euthanasia involves crossing the line established by the fundamental rule that we must not intentionally kill one another. In short, it would unavoidably harm the value of respect for life, which means that legalizing euthanasia involves a radical change in our society’s values.

Pro-euthanasia advocates often argue that seeing life as “sacred” is a religious value and therefore should not be taken into account in the formulation of public policy. But respect for life is not just a religious value; it’s a foundational value of all societies in which reasonable people would want to live. Concern over the consequences of legalizing euthanasia raises the question of whether a utilitarian case against euthanasia can be made. Exploring this question shows that the utilitarian case for euthanasia is not nearly as strong as the commission argues it is.

Many seriously harmful consequences from legalizing euthanasia could far outweigh any benefits it might have. Apart from its harmful impact on the societal value of respect for life, it would harm the institutions of law and medicine. Can we even imagine teaching medical students how to kill their patients?

The committee tells us that in accepting, as we do in some cases, the withdrawal of life-support treatment to allow a person to die, we are already practising euthanasia; therefore, legalizing euthanasia is just a small step forward. But

these are false and misleading analogies in support of a false and misleading line of argument. It's legalizing euthanasia through confusion. There is a radical difference between killing a person and allowing them to die of natural causes. In proposing to replace the word euthanasia with the term "aide médicale à mourir," the committee is introducing a euphemism that both trivializes and is likely to conceal underlying moral and ethical issues.

If we are to have a discussion about euthanasia, it must be an unbiased one. It's hard for me to conclude from its report that the National Assembly committee undertook such an unbiased reflection, especially in view of the fact that two-thirds of the submissions it received argued against legalizing euthanasia.

*Margaret Somerville is founding director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law. Dr. Somerville recently gave a lecture at Brescia College - University of Western Ontario. If you wish to receive the DVD of her lecture, please send us your request accompanied by a specific donation of \$25 or more.*

## NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

### SPAIN: PARTIES TO REJECT EUTHANASIA

The two main political parties in Spain have joined forces to reject a Euthanasia bill and have committed to improving access to palliative care.

The Conservative People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) agreed to oppose the latest attempt to legalize euthanasia in Spain.

Maria Torrado of the PP said that her party supports the extension of palliative care, which "helps to improve quality of life and to ensure that the patient is without pain," and that "it is unnecessary to open a debate about

euthanasia and its penal deregulation" which "adds no value to care beyond a clear ideological intention."

Julio Villarrubia of the PSOE enunciated a similar position, ensuring that the end of life occurs "without pain" but "without speaking of euthanasia."

### PARIS: 700 PROTEST AGAINST EUTHANASIA

A protest organized near the Eiffel tower in Paris to oppose the push to legalize euthanasia in France. The protest is part of a 50-city tour across France that has been organized by the group Alliance Vita. The signs stated: Caring not Killing.

### GEORGIA: SENATE AND HOUSE APPROVE BILL TO PROTECT CITIZENS FROM ASSISTED SUICIDE

Bill HB-1114 to prohibit assisted suicide was approved in the Georgia Senate by a vote of 38 to 11 and in the Georgia House by a vote of 115 to 53.

The legislation replaced a previous law that prohibited advertising for the purpose of assisting a suicide. The previous law was struck down by the Georgia State Supreme Court.

The new law will ensure that assisting a suicide is prosecuted as a felony and it will ensure that groups, such as the Final Exit Network, will not be able to operate in Georgia.

The Final Exit Network assisted the suicide death of John Celmer, a man who was experiencing deep depression while recovering from cancer. Four members were charged with assisted suicide, tampering with evidence and violation of anti-racketeering laws.

The suicide lobby group Compassion & Choices is pressuring Georgia Governor Nathan Deal to veto the bill.

EPC asked our supporters to email Governor Deal asking him to sign the bill.



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### ... Quebec from page 1

range of palliative care options available today. We support these recommendations. EPC believes that improvements to pain and symptom management must be systematically implemented before the issue of euthanasia can be fairly addressed.

However, EPC vigorously opposes the second half of the report which recommends legalizing Belgian-style euthanasia. Euthanasia is the act of a person, often a physician, who directly and intentionally causes the death of another person by lethal injection for reasons of mercy. Euthanasia is prosecuted as a homicide in Canada and in nearly every jurisdiction in the world. Legalizing euthanasia requires an amendment to the homicide statute in the Criminal Code giving one person the right to cause the death of another person in certain situations. Such an action would cause a profound shift in the relationship that people share with medical professionals and with each other within society.

It is important to note that the commission's report does not limit euthanasia to terminally ill people. A person who is living with an incurable condition and chronic psychological suffering, such as someone with chronic depression or another chronic mental condition, could be euthanized.

A study from the Netherlands that was published in the Journal

of Clinical Oncology (September 2005) found that people with a depressed mood were 4.1 times more likely to request euthanasia. The study concluded that a depressed mood is a primary indicator for requests for euthanasia.

The commission recommends that euthanasia deaths be reported, after the death, to monitor and evaluate whether the law is being abused. But the reporting procedure does not protect people. If a report is analyzed, and if an abuse has occurred, the person is already dead; so no effective redress is possible.

In Belgium, studies indicate that the law has been abused. A study published in the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association (May 2010) found that 32% of euthanasia deaths in the Flanders region of Belgium occurred without request or consent, while a study that was published in the British Medical Journal (Oct. 2010) found that 47% of euthanasia deaths in the same region of Belgium were not reported.

Currently, the law clearly states that no one can kill another person. If euthanasia becomes legal, killing another person becomes acceptable under certain conditions - conditions that are changeable and dependent on the ethics of others. It would be very difficult to protect a vulnerable person under these circumstances.

### Coming Up

#### Euthanasia Prevention Coalition To Produce New Pamphlet

EPC is producing a pamphlet opposing euthanasia, to be distributed throughout Canada. Written in common language, in both English and French, it clarifies what euthanasia and assisted suicide are, what euthanasia and assisted suicide are not, while effectively explaining why euthanasia and assisted suicide must be prohibited. The English version will be available in 4 weeks.

EPC is taking orders for the publication: *Protecting People: The Case Against Euthanasia*. We are asking for a donation of \$25 per 100 copies, or \$20 per 100 for orders greater than 500 copies or more.

EPC is asking supporters to distribute the pamphlet in their communities across Canada. If you are unable to distribute the document, then consider making a donation to enable EPC to distribute it far and wide.

### Back Talk

#### Write To Global News 16 x 9

Carolyn Jarvis of Global News claimed to have "opened up the debate on euthanasia." She presented three adults, all of whom advocate the euthanasia of three disabled people. In a very sympathetic view of Robert Latimer, Global News appears to advocate that such persons should be killed. See page 1 for details.

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