

MEDIA PROMOTE DEATH OF SUSAN GRIFFITHS

By Alex Schadenberg

The media is promoting the sad story of Susan Griffiths of Winnipeg, Manitoba, who died at the Dignitas suicide clinic in Switzerland. Griffiths had Multiple System Atrophy, a condition that would have left her significantly disabled.

I understand Griffiths' feelings and her fear of living with disabilities, but her condition and her story are only part of the assisted dying debate. Her condition is not a reason to legally permit physicians to lethally inject or to prescribe suicide to their patients.

Legalizing Euthanasia or assisted suicide (assisted death) permits in law one group of people to have the right to kill another group of people, their patients, whose lives are deemed to be not worth living.

The law prohibiting assisted suicide is designed to protect people. Every nation has laws that protect people from homicide (murder) and nearly every

nation has laws that protect people from other people assisting their suicide. These are good laws, because they protect people in times of crisis.

In Switzerland, where Griffiths died, there are few [safeguards](#) to protect people from abuse: she was approved for assisted suicide within a few minutes. The [Dignitas suicide clinic](#), where Griffiths died, has been implicated in significant abuse.

In Belgium and the Netherlands, studies have proven that the "safeguards" are often ignored, the law is abused and people are dying without request. Consider the following three recent studies of assisted death in the Flanders Region of Belgium.

The first study examined records of 208 assisted deaths, finding that 66 deaths, or 32% of assisted deaths were done without explicit request. They also found that the unrequested assisted deaths were more likely to be people who were over the age of 80,

did not have cancer, were incompetent to consent and who died in the hospital. The authors concluded:

"This demographic fits the description of a vulnerable patient group at risk of life-ending without request."

The second study examined the same 208 assisted deaths, finding that [only 52.8% of the assisted deaths were reported](#). The Belgian law requires that all assisted deaths be reported. The study concluded:

"As such legislation alone does not seem sufficient to reach the goal of transparency (total or 100% transparency seems to be a rather utopian ideal)."

The third study examined the [role of nurses in physician-assisted deaths in Belgium](#). The researchers determined that 248 nurses of a sample of 1265 were recently involved with an as-

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THE SPRINGTIME MARCH

EUTHANASIA IN QUEBEC? NO THANKS!

Organization is well underway for this major demonstration in Quebec City. Spokespersons intend to provide a very clear message to the public, the media, and the government.

La Marche Printanière will take place at the site of some of Canada's most historic events. If you have ever wanted to visit Quebec City, make Saturday May 18 the day.

Marchers are to gather by 12:00

noon, on the grounds of the Plains of Abraham outside of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

While the marshals provide orientation and instructions, entertainment, music, and speeches fill in the time before the march itself. The march begins at 1:45 PM, and proceeds along Grande Allée directly to the Parliament buildings. The 1.7 km walk should take about 30 minutes.



Once at the Parliament buildings, the main speakers will address the expected crowds. The march will disperse at 4:30 PM.

Restaurants and other attractions abound in the area, so plan to make new friends in great surroundings.

Amy Hasbrouck of Toujours Vivant / Not Dead Yet



Amy Hasbrouck with John Kelly

Sue Griffiths of Winnipeg, MB is the latest person to publicize her desire for assisted suicide, and to have her efforts celebrated by the press.

Last week, her plea for parliament to re-open the assisted suicide question was widely reported as she prepared to go to Dignitas, a clinic in Switzerland that helps people kill themselves.

Ms. Griffiths has Multiple Systems Atrophy, a degenerative neurological condition which causes pain in about half the people who have it. Photos show her standing, walking and using her hands; she is certainly not a person who is “physically unable to commit suicide without help.” She is described as a person who is in charge of her life, but she apparently wants to have someone else take charge of her death.

The reasons she gives for wanting to kill herself are related to disability, needing help

THE LATEST ENVIRONICS RESEARCH POLL SURVEY

An Environics Research group National Omnibus survey claims that 55% of Canadians support the legalization of euthanasia while 63% support the legalization of assisted suicide. The national poll of 2008 adult Canadians was done in March 2013 and has a margin of error of 2.2% 19 times out of 20.

Similar to previous polls, this actually shows that very few Canadians strongly support the legalization of euthanasia (18%) or assisted suicide (29%). Most of the support for euthanasia or assisted suicide falls within the “somewhat support” category. Canadians who somewhat supported euthanasia or assisted suicide “hesitantly” supported it.

The poll found that: Allophones, people over 60, people with disabilities, and people in a lower income bracket

were more likely to oppose the legalization of euthanasia than support it.

The strongest opposition to assisted suicide was found among Allophones, ages 18-29, and people in lower income brackets.

The greater question is - why do people support the legalization of euthanasia or assisted suicide?

A similar Environics Research group poll done in October 2011 found that:

- 66% of Canadians want the provincial and federal governments to improve access to palliative care. In every region of Canada, and every political affiliation, a majority wanted a greater priority on palliative care.
- 76% of Canadians expressed concern that elderly persons in abusive

situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. The Canadian government has made elder abuse prevention a national priority. Conservative voters were more likely to be concerned about elder abuse than other political affiliations.

- 74% of Canadians are concerned that legal assisted suicide would expose people who are sick, elderly, or have disabilities to euthanasia without consent.

The 2013 Environics poll found that support for euthanasia and assisted suicide is not increasing in Canada and it found that Canadians remain divided on the issues.

In contrast to the court decision in British Columbia, there is no consensus supporting the legalization of euthanasia or assisted suicide in Canada.

with personal care and other daily activities, having to use adaptive equipment, losing independence. The subtext is that, as a person with a disability, she believes she will be less worthy, less dignified, less than fully human.

In point of fact, disability is NOT a fate worse than death. When people become disabled, they must grieve the loss of abilities they had, just as a parent might grieve the loss of a child, or one grieves the loss of one's home after a natural disaster. But no one would suggest it's a good idea for the bereaved parent or survivor of a natural disaster to commit suicide, much less that she/he be helped to die.

We have a policy to prevent suicides, and rightfully so. We apply this policy to people whose despair arises from social as well as psychological stresses; bullied adolescents, LGBT people who've been persecuted, Aboriginal people struggling with poverty and loss of cultural heri-

tage, and survivors of domestic violence. People with disabilities who lack services and supports to live in their homes and be integrated in their communities face the same discrimination and social stressors. Suicide prevention policies and services should be applied equally to disabled and non-disabled people, without bias or prejudice about the quality of life with a disability. And society must begin to address the underlying discrimination and stigma that create the conditions in which people with disabilities live.

We should really be asking: Why is no one trying to stop Susan Griffiths from committing suicide? Does the media orgy around Griffiths story mean that we believe the everyday realities of living with a disability are reason enough to get help to die? And should the media rise to the bait every time a person with a disability flaunts their suicide in the public square.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

MONTANA

Bill SB 220, that would have legalized assisted suicide in Montana, died in the Senate Judiciary committee. Bill HB 505, intended to protect people from assisted suicide, passed in the Montana House and was defeated in the Senate by a vote of 27 – 23.

CONNECTICUT

Bill HB 6645, that would have legalized "Oregon style" assisted suicide, was defeated.

VERMONT

Bill SB 77, that would legalize assisted suicide in Vermont, was amended in a confusing manner in the Vermont Senate. The original version of SB

77 is being debated in the House. It is our hope that SB 77 will be defeated due to its confusing language.

AUSTRALIA

Bills to legalize euthanasia have been introduced in the South Australia parliament, the Tasmanian parliament, and the New South Wales parliament.

The bill in South Australia is sponsored by Bob Such, who has sponsored a bill to legalize euthanasia many times. The bill in Tasmania is projected to be defeated.

SCOTLAND

The Care Not Killing Alliance and Not Dead Yet UK are preparing to defeat the bill that is expected by Margo MacDonald.

MacDonald's previous bill was soundly defeated a few years ago.

ENGLAND

The UK is expecting to face a bill to legalize assisted suicide.

SWITZERLAND

Assisted Suicide groups in Switzerland are complaining that a government sponsored research study that is examining the practice of assisted suicide is biased. Researchers have denied the charges and have offered to discuss the concerns with the assisted suicide groups, but the groups have refused.

This is the first government sponsored research study of assisted suicide in Switzerland.

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sisted death, and 120 of those deaths (45%) were done without explicit request. They also found that 14 of the nurses admitted to carrying-out the assisted deaths, specifically forbidden by Belgian law. To make matters worse, two of the nurses admitted performing euthanasia without consulting the physician. The study concluded that:

“It seems that the current law (which does not allow nurses to administer the life-ending drugs) and a control system do not prevent nurses from administering life-ending drugs.”

The Belgian justice system has never laid charges, nor attempted prosecution, of any person for abusing the Belgian euthanasia law.

Even though the Netherlands has attempted to control the euthanasia law, the number of [unreported euthanasia deaths increased between 2005 - 2010](#). The Dutch have approved euthanasia for [children with disabilities](#) and people with dementia and they have approved [mobile euthanasia clinics](#) that offer a door to morgue service. In the Netherlands, [euthanasia is out-of-control](#).

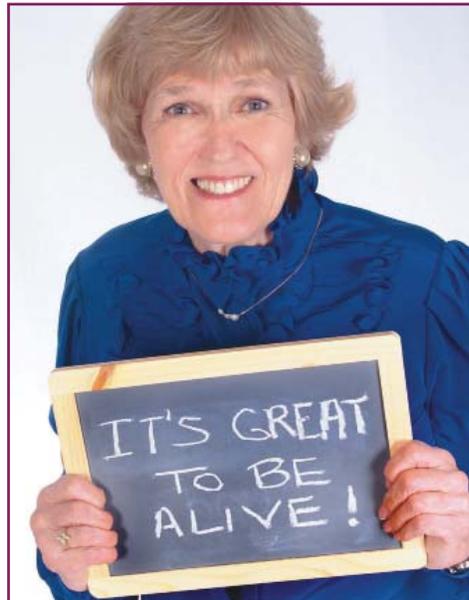
To learn more about abuses of the Belgium and Netherlands Euthanasia laws, order the book [Exposing Vulnerable People to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide](#). (\$20 includes shipping).

Since Oregon’s assisted suicide law has tighter restrictions than Belgium or Netherlands, some people suggest that an “Oregon style” law can be legalized without fear of abuse. Oregon’s

law is not without abuse or problems.

[Barbara Wagner](#) had recurrent lung cancer and was prescribed Tarceva, a more aggressive treatment. Oregon denied her cancer treatment, and offered her assisted suicide instead.

[Jeanette Hall](#), an Oregon resident, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She requested to die by assisted suicide. Instead, Hall’s physician convinced her to try a few treatment options. Twelve years later, Hall is happy to be alive.



“I’m Jeanette Hall. If my doctor had believed in assisted suicide, I would be dead.”

Her story demonstrates how legalizing assisted suicide may lead people experiencing depression or fear to give up on life prematurely.

An Oregon study by [Linda Ganzini](#) examined 58 cases of people who requested assisted suicide. She found that 15 of them were depressed or experiencing feelings of extreme hopelessness. Of the 15 people who were

diagnosed as depressed, 3 died by assisted suicide. None were offered a psychiatric evaluation by their doctor.

Another Oregon physician recently wrote about how his [depressed patient died by assisted suicide](#).

Others are concerned about the lack of transparency in Oregon’s law. Isaac Jackson, an attorney in Oregon, stated that he was unable to obtain information concerning a suspicious death because the person had died by assisted suicide and all the documentation was considered private. If a person is killed outside the law, no one can investigate.

Legalizing euthanasia and/or assisted suicide (assisted death) gives physicians the power, in law, to directly and intentionally cause the death or to prescribe the suicide of their patients. **It is not safe, and will never be safe.**

In jurisdictions where assisted death has been legalized, abuses have occurred, and safeguards in the law have been ignored. **Abuse will occur. Some doctors will act outside the law, and cause deaths without request. The only unknown is how many deaths without request are considered acceptable within society?**

The CBC and other major media outlets are doing their fellow citizens grave harm by abandoning their duty to examine all aspects of this issue. As they continue to treat Susan Griffiths’ as an occasion to actively promote euthanasia and assisted suicide, they are exposing tens of thousands of vulnerable citizens to the very real possibility of being put to death without their knowledge or consent, and without the possibility of justice after death.