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From the Editor's Desk

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Active Euthanasia: Assisted Suicide

A collective sigh of relief crossed the United States when the initiative for active euthanasia in California failed for lack of signatures this past May, 1988. However, Derek Humphry, the initiator and founder of the Hemlock Society, and the driving force for assisted suicide, was not deterred by his failure and vowed that he and his followers would be successful in 1990 when the opportunity would present itself again.

In the meantime, we have time to mount a counter offensive against his efforts to undermine our Hippocratic Oath and to unleash upon our country a soul-destroying philosophy and practice reminiscent of the euthanasia movement in Nazi Germany. The great debate in regard to active euthanasia or assisted suicide is in its initial stages and will be the subject of many newspaper articles, television talk shows, movies and editorials over the new few years. The legislatures and courts will become deeply involved and various interest groups can be counted upon to sway public opinion in favor of their point of view.

The American Medical Association has belatedly chosen to become involved in this debate and it will be interesting to see how well it performs in defending against this threat to its vital center and core of its medical ethic. While the AMA has reaffirmed its total opposition to active euthanasia, it will take more than that to stem the tide against this initiative to make it legal. It will require time, effort, and money to implement its unequivocal opposition. As in World War II, the motto, "Deeds, not words, will be the only things that count in overcoming this menace to our civilization.

In the meantime, every group in this country which cherishes the dignity

and sacredness of human life should join in the battle to preserve our ideals, for our ethical commitment to do no harm, and to preserve our stance as a healing profession.

It is important for us to familiarize ourselves with the active euthanasia movement currently going on in the Netherlands. This once proud medical profession which stood up to Hitler in World War II in opposition to his euthanasia program is now actively following in his footsteps in violation of the Hippocratic Oath and the World Health Organization's stand against active euthanasia. In a series of articles in the current *Issues in Law and Medicine*, all of this is documented in disturbing detail. The articles recount the thousands of patients who are involuntarily terminated by their physicians and describe the fears of nursing home patients who are afraid of being killed, and the cooperation of the courts and the government in this movement.

When life is no longer held sacred and the dignity of the individual is no longer upheld, the scene is set for utter chaos in society and the degradation of the human race. Many of us steeped in the Judeo-Christian ethic, foresaw this when abortion was legalized and knew that euthanasia was the next logical step. Direct euthanasia is here now. It will take a mighty effort by all men of good will to turn this threat aside and now is the time to do it.

For euthanasia, like abortion, constitutes a major breach against the laws of humanity. It could, in fact, signify the abandoning of the very concept of democracy and relegate us to a new world and society which will be totalitarian. A society in which people may dispose of the very lives of others who have to be declared fit by others to receive from society the right to live. A society in which the individual can exist only if he is wanted by others and who, therefore, ceases to have absolute value. A society in which the weak must yield to the stronger. This is more than decadence. This is a gradual return to the law of the jungle, to an animalistic society where the survival of the fittest is the rule. Darwinian principles, applied to human beings, are truly the starting point in a process of decline and decadence which will lead to the end of human civilization.¹

I strongly urge all of our readers to become actively involved. We should be informed about the active euthanasia movement. It is not enough to be against it. We must address the underlying fears of persons who would be tempted to resort to this degrading practice. The fear of pain, suffering and isolation in the dying process must be addressed. The fear of losing control must be squarely faced. The lessons of the hospice movement must be told over and over again. Remedial courses in pain control must be offered and physicians and nurses well-grounded in these disciplines should be the order of the day. Physicians and nurses should give public witness to their successes in managing the dying process and affirm in their lives the validity and commitment to their Oath. We should demonstrate to the world and the media that we are who we say we are: dedicated, committed, compassionate professionals who will be with our patients through their sufferings, helping them, caring for them until the Lord Himself receives them into His kingdom where no tear is shed or pain experienced. For it is fear, suffering

and loneliness which affect us all, especially when we are dying. It is then that we can no longer control things. It is then that we learn the eternal truth and wisdom and find that we are all dependent upon one another and cannot make it without the love and help of our fellowman. It is this truth which our Lord tried to teach us. We are so slow to learn. But let us, in our faith in Him, be that person when we are needed most.

Let us be like the nun in the hospice who goes in to comfort the patient and whispers gently in the patient's ear the consoling words of Christ. If patients had this type of reassurance, the euthanasia movement would evaporate and disappear as it should, because it is based upon a vacuous, materialistic premise incompatible with the spiritual nature of man!

—John P. Mullooly, M.D.
Editor

Reference

1. Scheppers, Ph., M.D., "Euthanasia, Our Own Future?", *Issues in Law and Medicine*, 3:384, Spring, 1988.
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