

Resolution Opposing the Legalization of Physician Assisted Suicide

Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) - Disability Advocacy Worldwide. 1997.

In their 1997 resolution opposing the legalization of physician assisted suicide, the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) provides a long list of reasons for their opposition to physician assisted suicide, including the negative aspects of allowing physicians to have such power, the insufficiency of proposed safeguards, and dissatisfaction with the implementation of safeguards in conjunction with euthanasia in the Netherlands. Internet publication URL: www.independentliving.org/docs6/tash199712.html

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WHEREAS, the U.S. Supreme Court has determined that assisted suicide is not a constitutional right, but is an issue to be decided by the states; and

WHEREAS, bills to legalize physician-assisted suicide are currently pending before state legislatures; and

WHEREAS, no bill to legalize physician-assisted suicide applies to all citizens equally, but singles out individuals based on their health status in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act; and

WHEREAS the legalization of physician-assisted suicide give physicians the power to decide who will be given suicide prevention and who will receive suicide assistance and is, therefore, not based on individual choice and autonomy; and

WHEREAS current trends in managed care and health care rationing threaten to diminish the availability of health care and related services needed by people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS people with disabilities and chronic illnesses may be driven to despair as a result of fear of being forced into a nursing home or institution, fear of being a physical or financial burden on their families, lack of information, about independent living option, and weariness from the daily struggle to get their legal needs met; and

WHEREAS, any proposed legal "safeguard" requiring that physician-assisted suicide only be available to terminally ill individuals who voluntarily request it will not protect people with disabilities from abuse; and

WHEREAS, numerous courts have ruled that people with non-terminal disabilities are the same as terminally ill patients in that the usual state interest in preserving life does not apply to them; and

WHEREAS, many people with non-terminal disabilities are currently and repeatedly pressured to sign "do-not-resuscitate" orders and other advance directives calling for withholding and withdrawal of medical treatment; and

WHEREAS, there is no empirical data indicating that current laws concerning advance directives are applied on a nondiscriminatory basis; and

WHEREAS, over a decade of experience with these "safeguards" in the Netherlands demonstrates that significant numbers of people with non-terminal illnesses and disabilities have been involuntarily euthanized; and

WHEREAS enforcement of laws and regulations is unlikely in a social context which devalues people with disabilities as a drain on limited health care resources,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, TASH opposes the legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide.

Adopted December 1997

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