



Canberra Declaration

Protecting our Australian Values

21 March, 2018

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA, ACT 2601

The Dangers of Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide

Dear Secretary,

This submission is made by the **Canberra Declaration**, which has been signed by 79,276 Australian citizens of which 1,822 are from the Australian Capital Territory. We oppose the legalisation of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in Australian society.

Under the heading '**Human Life**', the Canberra Declaration states – **"We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life's natural end. ...The very heart of a humane and civilised society is based on the way it treats its most vulnerable and innocent members including the unborn and the disabled. ... We will not comply with any directive that compels us to participate in or facilitate abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia, or any other act that involves the intentional taking of innocent human life"** (underscores added).

While Australians are a compassionate people, our compassion should never drive us to support killing an individual through euthanasia or to help someone with their suicide. Collectively, as Australians, we have a duty of care for the vulnerable members of our society. Sadly, the euphemistic descriptions of euthanasia and assisted suicide, such as '*assisted dying*' or '*death with dignity*', are very misleading. While the deaths of vulnerable citizens are the result, these practices are in the final analysis not about dying but about killing. In a similar vein, the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide does not give individuals the 'right to die' but the 'right to be killed' by a physician or by their own hand.

Therefore, we maintain that doctors need to operate with absolute repugnance to killing their patients. The Australian Medical Association president, Dr Michael Gannon, has publicly stated that "*doctors should have no role in intentionally ending a patient's life.*" As a medical professional, he is not alone in saying this. Dr Gannon points out that of the 109 medical associations representing different countries, 107 oppose euthanasia.

Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide completely overturns present longstanding medical ethics. This drastically changes the relationship between doctors and their patients. Every doctor potentially becomes an agent of state-sanctioned killing. This duty to kill goes against the Hippocratic Oath which states, "*I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect.*" In forswearing the giving of poison when asked for it, the physician rejects the view that the patient's choice to be killed can make killing him or her right.

Freedom, Truth, Human Dignity, Justice & Compassion

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In considering end of life choices, Australia has the advantage of observing what has happened in countries where euthanasia and assisted suicide have already been legalised. One very sobering observation is that wherever these practices have been legalised, they have expanded to include more groups of vulnerable people. This unintended and apparently unavoidable outcome is now described as “*scope creep*”. This is where the criteria for state-sanctioned killing grows to include non-terminal illnesses, psychological disorders, especially depression, and even the euthanasia of children.

In 2014, Belgium became the first country to allow the euthanasia of children. In the Netherlands, there has been a very dramatic increase of euthanasia for chronic psychiatric patients and patients with advanced dementia. Tragically there are a growing number of horrific reports of hospital patients being euthanised without consent or notifying family members.

Canada, however, has become the prime example of how these practices cannot be controlled by law. Last year Health Canada reported that there were nearly 2,000 deaths by euthanasia in the first year of its legalisation. It seems that the number deaths by euthanasia each year in Canada will quickly surpass the Netherlands and Belgium where it has been legal since 2002 and 2003 respectively. A push to extend the 2016 Canadian law is now underway in the courts.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are huge social changes which are fraught with dangers than can lead to horrific abuses. We urge the ACT to heed the wise counsel of Australian, international and historic experts in medical ethics. Australian society needs policies that encourage caring for and saving lives, not killing.

As the Canberra Declaration states, **“the very heart of a humane and civilised society is based on the way it treats its most vulnerable and innocent members ...”**

Please vigorously recommend against the legalisation of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in the ACT.

Yours faithfully,

David Rowsome

for the Canberra Declaration Team & Community

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