

# EUTHANASIA

## Should terminally ill New Zealander's over the age of 18 have the right to die?

By Bailey Sutherland

Euthanasia means to take deliberate action with the express intention of ending a life to relieve unstoppable suffering (Medical News Journal, 2016). As nurses we often care for severely sick and terminally ill patients as part of our clinical practice and thus may be asked about and exposed to requests for euthanasia. Euthanasia raises numerous moral, ethical and legal issues where it has developed into a highly controversial topic not only in New Zealand but all over the world. It is often looked over and people don't realise how much of an effect the issue of euthanasia has on the health care professionals and the implications of this.

### Literature Review

- Patients living with cancer compromise the largest group of people who have requested euthanasia previously. Seventy terminally ill cancer patients took part in an interview revealing that 73% of participants believed that euthanasia should be legalised (Wilson, Scott, & Graham 2000).
- *For Euthanasia:* The Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand believes that under carefully prescribed conditions, it should be legal. Where they can say a conscious farewell to their family and friends.
- *Against Euthanasia:* Euthanasia Free New Zealand argues that there are methods in which doctors can fully sedate their patient to keep them as comfortable as possible until they pass. Requests from patients for euthanasia are not completely based on pain, but due to feeling like a burden or socially isolated.

### Implications

- Nurses in legalised countries believe that administering the lethal medication was an act beyond their competence.
- It is illegal for New Zealand nurses to be involved in euthanasia, resulting in loss of their registration. If legislation is ever passed, nurses need clear guidelines and professional support so they have an understanding of what aspects of euthanasia would lie in their scope of practice (Ritchie, 2016).
- The autonomy of the dying patient, relatives and health care professionals must be taken into account. For example, Although the majority of the New Zealand population tends to support euthanasia (Johnston, 2010). Doctors can refuse based on their own beliefs. The effect of euthanasia on nurses and health care professionals is significant, affecting all areas of their wellbeing. (Dickinson, Clark, Winslow & Marples, 2005)

### Recommendations

- Education and communication: Making sure patients and families are well aware of the options (Hospice New Zealand, 2017).
- New Zealand Nurses Organisation to join with other nursing organisations in countries where euthanasia is legalised. Educating nurses regarding what to do when a patient presents them with a euthanasia request and what professional obligations they must follow.
- Support for Nurses: Resources provided to help manage stressors regarding euthanasia. Encouraging nurses to seek the expertise and advice from other colleagues (American Nurses Association, 2013).

### Conclusion

The medical profession will need to be well trained and have clear guidelines within which they are secure and can operate, considering the evidence of the emotional toll on health professionals in countries with legal euthanasia, I believe it is important to give doctors and nurses a choice on whether they want to actively participate in someone's euthanasia request. Even if euthanasia was to become legal, medical professionals should have the possibility to opt-out without repercussions if their reasoning is based on the 'do no harm' and non maleficence aspect of their clinical practice.

### References

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**Rationale:**

Visual aids are those sensory objects or images which initiate or stimulate and support learning. They are described as any device which can be used to make the learning experience more real, accurate and active (Shabiralyani, Hasan, Hamad, Iqbal, 2015). A study published in the Health Information and Libraries Journal found that poster presentations are some of the most commonly used formats for communicating information in academic and public health fields. The report also identified that these tools have the ability to increase knowledge, change attitudes and alter behaviors (Illic & Rowe, 2013).

I chose to present my information in a poster format for these above reasons. Where I believe using a poster presentation is an effective way of transferring knowledge. I felt as though it was important to inform and promote awareness of the current issues that are raised by the controversial topic of euthanasia and how this can potentially effect health care professionals in New Zealand. Because I have conveyed my information in a poster form, I believe that it could benefit many nurses as it is presented in an engaging and artistic manner. Which is also easy to read where they can take away the main points easily.

PECOT Category:	Information relating to the question	Explanation:
Population	People over the age of 18 living with a terminal illness.	In New Zealand, 18 years old is the age where your parents or legal guardian are no longer responsible for you, where you are deemed legal to be able to make your own decisions regarding your health.
Exposure:	Terminally ill patients with a significant drop in quality of life, who strongly believe in Euthanasia as a method to end their suffering and control their death.	It will be interesting to see the opinions of different groups and people around euthanasia and if it would be an option that they support or disagree with.
Comparison:	Should the right to die with dignity be more important than a governments law of Euthanasia. Looking at what groups and people are for/against euthanasia and the reasoning behind this.	Same as above.
Outcome:	The outcome evidence will show reasons why people support or don't support euthanasia and what impact this has on society and in particular nursing practice.	This is essential to gain an understanding of why or why not euthanasia should be legalised in New Zealand and what implications this could have on nursing practice.
Time:	21st century.	No time frame needed.
(Schneider, Whitehead, LeBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2013, p63)		

**References:**

Shabiralyani, G., Hasan, K., Hamad, N., Iqbal, N. (2015). Impact of Visual Aids in Enhancing the Learning Process Case Research: District Dera Ghazi Khan. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 19(6), 226-233

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