

Recipes To Die For

Euthanasia Advocates Gaining Ground

By Father John Flynn, LC

ROME, APRIL 26, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Proponents of legalized euthanasia continue to wage their campaign in a number of countries, and with some success.

In Britain, Dr. Philip Nitschke, a longtime activist for euthanasia, is promoting sales of a home kit to help people commit suicide. This latest move by the well-known advocate of euthanasia is causing widespread criticism in the United Kingdom, according to an article published in the Australian newspaper April 20.

As a result, Nitschke's invitation to speak on May 14 at a debate to be held by the Oxford Union was withdrawn.

It would be illegal to sell the kit, which tests the strength of a drug, Nembutal, in Nitschke's home country of Australia, so that is why it is being launched in Britain. A book he published in 2005, "The Peaceful Pill Handbook," was also banned in Australia.

It's not the first time Nitschke has caused an uproar in the United Kingdom, as the Observer newspaper explained on March 29. Last year his organization, Exit International, ran a series of workshops advising people on how to commit suicide. One of them was cancelled after the local council in Bournemouth objected.

The Swiss-based assisted suicide clinic Dignitas has also recently been in the headlines. Dignitas accepts clients from overseas who want to put an end to their lives and has attracted a lot of attention.

According to an April 3 report in the London-based Times newspaper, the founder of Dignitas, Ludwig Minelli, plans to help a healthy woman die together with her husband who is terminally sick. The wife is healthy, but the Canadian couple has made a suicide pact to die together.

According to the article, Minelli described suicide as a "marvelous opportunity" that should not be restricted to the sick or disabled people. The Times also reported that the Zurich University Clinic found that more than a fifth of people who had died at Dignitas did not have a terminal illness.

Privacy right

In the United States the situation is no better. Late last year a judge in the state of Montana ruled that a local law making assisted suicide illegal violates the state constitution.

According to an article in the Dec. 29 issue of the Weekly Standard magazine, Judge Dorothy McCarter held that the ban contravenes the state constitution's right to privacy. As well, she invoked a clause in the constitution upholding human dignity, arguing that the terminally ill have a right to die with dignity. Her decision, however, is being appealed.

Pro-euthanasia forces won a battle in the state of Washington in November when voters approved a referendum legalizing assisted suicide. With the vote, Washington joined Oregon as the second state to approve suicide.

According to a Nov. 5 report in the Seattle Times, the proposal was modeled on the law in Oregon and allows the terminally ill, who must be mentally-competent adult residents of Washington, and who are medically predicted to have six months or less to live, to request and self-administer lethal medication prescribed by a physician.

Euthanasia campaigners enjoyed a hefty financial advantage, the Seattle Times noted. Supporters of

the initiative had about \$4.9 million in funds, while opponents only raised around \$1.9 million.

Problems in Oregon

Following Oregon's path could lead to some nasty surprises for Washington state residents. Last year, news came out that some terminally ill persons in Oregon were denied treatment for their illnesses by authorities, and instead were offered assisted suicide.

A July 28 report by Fox News described how Randy Stoup, who suffered from prostate cancer, was denied financial help by the local state health plan for chemotherapy to treat his condition. The Lane Individual Practice Association, which runs the health plan, responded to Stoup's request by offering to pay for the cost of assisted suicide.

According to the report, other terminally-ill patients in Oregon have received similar responses to their requests for assistance.

Then, a report published Oct. 8 by the news service Health Day, gave details on a study of 46 people who had requested assisted suicide in Oregon in 2007.

Researchers from the Oregon Health and Sciences University discovered that none of the 46 were evaluated by a psychologist or psychiatrist to evaluate if they were suffering from problems such as depression that can spur some people to put an end to their lives.

They also checked the records of another 58 patients who requested assisted suicide in 2008. It turned out that 15 met the criteria for depression and 13 for anxiety. By the end of the study, three of those who received assistance to commit suicide met the criteria for depression.

The researchers concluded that the way the assisted suicide regime is being practiced in Oregon "may not adequately protect all mentally ill patients."

Manual

More worrying news came with the recent discovery that Nitschke isn't the only one distributing suicide manuals. In the United States, the Final Exit Network has a detailed document to instruct those who are assisting people to die, the Associated Press reported April 22.

The manual was seized by police in Phoenix who are investigating the Final Exit Network in relation to the death of a local woman.

Police are in Georgia, where the group is based, are also looking into the network's connection with some deaths.

In February an investigation led to searches by police in nine states and to four members being charged, including Thomas E. Goodwin, the group's president.

A March 3 story by the Associated Press said that, according to authorities in Georgia, the network may have helped around 200 people to die. It costs \$50 to join the group and members are assigned a guide to help them commit suicide.

Nonsense

The pressures to legalize assisted suicide have not gone unchallenged. The phrase "right to die" was described as a "fashionable piece of nonsense" by Dominic Lawson in an opinion article for the Sunday Times on Dec. 14.

We are not talking about a right to die, he clarified, but a right to be killed at a time of their choosing. This requires others to kill, and for that reason a majority of doctors want nothing to do with it, Lawson argued.

His argument was confirmed by recent data from a survey carried out by Clive Seale from the Centre for Health Sciences, Queen Mary University of London. Only a third of doctors are in favor of assisted suicide, according to Seale, the Guardian newspaper reported March 24.

Nearly 4,000 doctors replied to survey sent out by Seale and the answers were similar to those he obtained in a survey on the matter in 2004.

Wesley Smith, associate director of the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, warned that a right to die can become a duty to die, in an opinion article written for the Telegraph newspaper Feb. 21. Wesley had come to Britain from America to participate in an anti-euthanasia meeting held at the House of Commons.

“The whole of society, in fact, is required through its health care and civil institutions to respect the life and dignity of the seriously sick and the dying,” said Benedict XVI in an address given Feb. 25, 2008, to a group who had taken part in a meeting in the Vatican on caring for the dying.

The Pope urged greater attention to the needs of the dying, and to their families. This respect for life must take the form of concrete solidarity, he added. A task more demanding than just killing off the sick, but one which is more in accordance with human dignity.