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Physician Assisted Suicide in Colorado

When the quality of life can no longer be improved for patients with terminal conditions, what right do we have to tell them to keep pushing through the pain? Proposition 106 gives terminally ill patients with six months or less to live a way to die with dignity and choice where they want and when they want to die instead of having their illness kill them. Jefferson County Voters were right in voting yes on Proposition 106 for Physician Assisted Suicide.

Proposition 106 was based on Oregon's Physician Assisted Suicide laws and it has given patients relief from their suffering in Oregon and in the four other states that have passed similar laws. Like those states, Colorado’s Proposition 106 states that two doctors must sign off that the patient in question has a terminal disease and has six months or less to live. Receiving the drugs requires one written request that is witnessed by at least two other people, as well as two oral requests. This also saves Colorado money on hospice care and insurance. Debt.org posted that, “Nearly 42% of terminally ill Americans receive some sort of hospice care; 83% of them are older than 65, and more than one-third are older than 85.” That means that they would qualify for physician assisted suicide. It also states that, “About 85% of end-of-life care costs are covered by various government entities... Medicare paid an average of $153 per day, per person, in 2010 to cover hospice care.” The website also states that Medicaid programs spent about $1.639 billion on hospice. Now, don’t get my point confused. I am not saying that everyone with a terminal illness has to die since Proposition 106 is passed just to save Colorado a few bucks. Proposition 106 has many safety guards to protect the patient so the families can’t pressure the patient into dying to save money and it also prevents healthy people from committing suicide. The proposition states that 2 doctors must sign off that the patient has 6 months or less to live. Many people argue how doctors are not accurate at making estimates on how long someone has to live and the patient could live longer than 6 months. However, even if the 6 month estimate isn’t accurate, the patient is terminal so they are going to die anyway and there is nothing to stop that. It wouldn’t matter to a terminal patient if they get 6 months or 7 months. The point is that they are dying and there is no cure to help them. Others argue that the patient might be depressed and not fit to make the decision to end their life. To that I say, of course the patent is depressed because they know that they are dying and they have a disease that is going to kill them and they don’t have a cure. Even if doctors prescribe depression pills, the patient is still dying. We are giving them drugs that won’t help their disease or the fact that they are at the end of their life. With all of this in mind, the proposition gives patients the right to die with dignity and has safeguards to prevent people from abusing the proposition.

There are many stories online from patients and families that have fought for the right to die with dignity. Preventing patients for going peacefully only causes them unnecessary pain and suffering that could have been prevented. This is a story from a mother named Sarah Witte who wrote her story about her son named Andrew, in Maine, where Physician Assisted Suicide hadn’t passed. She wrote, “Five years ago, on May 19, 2010, my 27-year old son Andrew Nicholas Marshall died from an aggressive form of malignant brain tumor known as glioblastoma metaforme [*Sic*]. We knew the day of his diagnosis that his odds of survival were slim.” She described how they tried all their options of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation but she always focused on Andrew’s quality of life. She went on to describe how she made all the arrangements of the best hospice care however she wrote, “The one thing I could not provide, in Maine, was something that Andy wanted: the option to go when the end was near. So we went to the end. He was terrified.” Sarah later tells how she tried to convince the doctor to give her son more than recommended amount of painkillers to help him pass away easier since he was in a lot of pain. The doctor refused since it is against the law. Sarah ended her story by saying, “I know that he would have availed himself of a less painful end if he could have.” (Witte *It's an Individual Choice - Death With Dignity*). Andrew’s story shows how not having the right to die causes unnecessary pain and suffering and in the end, not having the proposition didn’t stop the patient from dying. The patient is going to die anyway but they could die more peacefully. Some argue that having the option of physician assisted suicide ends the patient's possibility of finding a cure and getting better. But the proposition is for patients in the last stages of life or have 6 months or less to live so if they aren’t testing for a cure now, they won’t find one in time to save that patient. We are making them live through the pain with just the hope of finding a cure but not a guarantee. Also, most patients get the medicine from the doctor to end their life and then don’t use it. They just like having the option. The comfort of having the drugs even though some patients don’t end up using them reassures the patient that if their quality of life becomes too difficult then they can die peacefully instead of in pain.

Humans value a happy and fulfilling life. Terminally ill patients can no longer improve on their quality of life because today's medicine cannot cure them. What kind of quality of life is it to wake up each morning and live day to day in lots of pain? The patients can die later in pain and have suffered the 6 months or die now with dignity and end the suffering. The quality of life for a terminally ill patient is low because they have so much pain. Some religious followers say that it is wrong to end life with medicine instead of naturally because it isn’t how God intended.

However, the patient is suffering and medicine cannot improve their quality of life so the patient wants to die with dignity. Even though a religious person wouldn’t personally end their life with physician assisted suicide, they have no right to speak for someone else who is in so much pain. Other people cannot imagine the pain they have to go through because of a terminal disease. Others say that death is a very permanent solution. To that I say, the disease is also permanent. The patient isn’t going to wake up one day and get better because they have no more options. There is nothing else the doctors can do for that patient.

All the evidence shows that this was a good decision to pass proposition 106. However, the issue isn’t over. Colorado joined the 5 other states with Physician Assisted Suicide but that still leaves 45 states that don’t have the right to die with dignity. Colorado gives terminally ill patients the right to die, which makes a strong case for other states to pass the same kind of laws. This topic is very timely because it just passed in Colorado and it is important for citizens to understand their rights and be aware if they need it because of a terminal diagnosis. So in conclusion, Jefferson County voters did the right thing by passing proposition 106. Thank You.

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