

The following statement was drafted by Gerald A. Larue, special editor of the euthanasia section of this issue, in cooperation with others.

# The Case for Active Voluntary Euthanasia

**W**e, the undersigned, declare our support for the decriminalization of medically induced active euthanasia when requested by the terminally ill.

We acknowledge that techniques developed by modern medicine have been beneficial in improving the quality of life and increasing longevity, but they have sometimes been accompanied by harmful and dehumanizing effects. We are aware that many terminally ill persons have been kept alive against their will by advanced medical technologies, and that terminally ill patients have been denied assistance in dying. In attempting to terminate their suffering by ending their lives themselves or with the help of loved ones not trained in medicine, some patients have botched their suicides and brought further suffering on themselves and those around them. We believe that the time is now for society to rise above the archaic prohibitions of the past and to recognize that terminally ill individuals have the right to choose the time, place, and manner of their own death.

We respect the opinions of those who declare that only the deity should determine the moment of death, or who find some spiritual merit in suffering, but we reject their arguments. We align ourselves with those who are committed to the defense of human rights, human dignity, and human self-determination: this includes the right to die with dignity. An underlying motive is compassion for those who wish to end their suffering by hastening their moment of death.

There are those who would make a distinction between "active" and "passive" euthanasia; they would support the abandonment of "heroic" efforts to sustain life while opposing any positive act to hasten death by increasing dosage of drugs or administering a lethal injection. We point out, however, that both passive and active euthanasia involve the intention of ending a person's life.

We support only *voluntary* euthanasia. We believe that once an adult has signed a living will expressing his or her personal wishes concerning treatment during a terminal illness and/or has signed a durable power of attorney for health care statement enabling another to act on his or her behalf, the individual's wishes should be respected. Because most persons lack professional knowledge concerning methods of inducing death, we believe that only a cooperating medical doctor should be the one to administer the life-taking potion or injection to the patient who has requested it and that the doctor should be able to fulfill the patient's request without fear or threat of prosecution.

We respect the doctor's and the hospital's right to refuse to participate in administering such terminal medications. We would urge the medical profession to make clear the patient's right to change doctors and hospitals should his or her wishes for aid in dying be refused. We would urge that every effort be made to honor the terminally ill person's wishes in regard to the time and place of death, and that if the patient desires family members to be present to give comfort, these requests will be respected.

We recognize that there may be some who would exploit the right to active voluntary euthanasia and take advantage of the ill and suffering. But we believe that protective laws can, and indeed must, be enacted to discourage and punish such action.

We respect the right of terminally ill individuals who do not wish to utilize euthanasia or hasten the moment of death. But we affirm that the wishes of those who believe in the right to die with dignity should be respected and that to do so involves the highest expression of moral compassion and beneficence.

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