



MEDIA RELEASE

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Assisted Suicide: Till love do us part?

In the past few months, it has been reported that Professor Sean Davison from a leading university in Cape Town, helped his mother to commit suicide. The fact that leading South Africans support him may make that act seem acceptable to the public, but assisted suicide should not be seen as an acceptable act. Doctors for Life International would like share the correct perspective concerning euthanasia and assisted suicide with South Africans.

Davison said, "What I did to help my mother at the end of her life, I did for the love of my mother." Prof. Davison's argument, that he killed his mother out of compassion is as old as the hills and is the argument that's being used all over the world to try to legalize euthanasia. For instance, when Holland started out with the practice of euthanasia, they said it would be done out of "compassion" for the elderly.

Unfortunately, not one of the countries, which have legalized Euthanasia, has stayed at killing the terminally ill "out of compassion". They have just carried on going further down a slippery slope from euthanasia/assisted suicide for the terminally ill, to assisted suicide for the chronically ill, to assisted suicide for the mentally ill, to euthanasia/assisted suicide for teenagers up to 16 years of age without the consent of their parents. Now Holland has legalized infanticide - the killing of children - if they are disabled babies or they have Down Syndrome. It is even reported that some medical aid societies offer cancer patients the option of assisted suicide to try to avoid paying for their treatment. There are vast levels of grief associated with such a slide. Every person, young and old, has the stamp of the image of God. Too often, the reality of what has been done later leads to serious consequences, such a deep guilt, depression and suicide.

Suicide contagion is a very real entity. The term euthanasia was actually coined in the eighteen hundreds, but many Euthanasia lobbyists like to apply this term to the Ancient Greeks. That ancient society realized that one suicide sparks many others, and they had laws against it. If they found that someone had committed suicide, the Greeks would have a mock trial, and as punishment,

they would mutilate the corpse, by for instance, chopping off a hand. They did this to discourage others at risk, from following that example. Suicide contagion is now a well established concept in modern psychiatry, according to Gould, S. (in *Suicide and the Media: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2001:932:200-224). He concludes, "Newspaper and television reports of suicide have been linked to increases in suicide rates".

Experience in Holland, and other countries which have legalized euthanasia, has shown that confidentiality issues surrounding euthanasia keep doctors from submitting details of requests for assisted suicide. That is to be expected when under-reporting of even such things as elder abuse is common throughout the world. A study from Cornell University in the USA found that for every reported case of elder abuse, 23.5 cases were not reported, and that for each reported case of financial abuse of elderly people, 43.9 actually occurred. As one would therefore expect, only the "perfect" cases of assisted suicide ever get reported. Are we going to try and argue that this will not be the case in South Africa?

It is our responsibility as South African's to provide proper care for the most vulnerable members of our society. We must not allow ourselves to get pulled into accepting the opinions of a few who want to be free to access assisted suicide. We have to recognize that the abuse of any legislated structure for legal euthanasia will occur very frequently. As a result, we as a society won't be able to protect anyone. The law will not help us. We have to admit that there will be huge problems of "turning a blind eye" to large numbers of illegal cases of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

We must remember that if we do not make the right decision now, we will pay for it with our lives or with the lives of our loved ones.

Doctors For Life International is an association of more than 1800 specialists and medical doctors. DFL endeavors to promote public health by upholding sound science in the medical profession. For more information, please visit www.dfl.org.za