



Vermont legislature debates assisted suicide

Laws in Oregon and Washington allow legally assisted suicide. Now Vermont is facing a "Death with Dignity Act." Similar bills have been rejected in California, Michigan, Maine, and Hawaii. Catholic Daughters in other states need to be alert to this topic.

The Vermont bill would allow a patient determined to have less than six months of life to request medication ending his or her life. The doctor may write a prescription or dispense the drug directly.

The legislation is written for patients who are considered competent and terminally ill. Experience from the Netherlands has shown that once the law is passed, however, assisted suicide expands. Doctors begin to include incompetent patients who suffer from strokes or dementia. Then those who aren't terminally ill, but who are severely handicapped are included. Next, competent people who are chronically depressed are given lethal drugs. Rather than working to improve end-of-life care, physicians and society are more inclined to find a way to end it.

Statistics from the Netherlands show the unforeseen consequences that assisted suicide brings. Family members have coerced patients to die. More than 1000 deaths per year—25 percent of the patients—did not request aid in dying. Even teenagers and infants with physical disabilities have been given lethal drugs under doctors' care.

According to the Vermont Alliance for Ethical Healthcare, this bill reverses 2500 years of doctors and society working to preserve life, not end it. The 1994 revision of the American Medical Association's Code of Medical Ethics retains the statement that "Physician assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would pose serious societal risks."

In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II said "euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person."

Pro-life group warns against term 'quality of life'

Guidelines from the National Catholic Bioethics Center warn people to avoid using the expression "quality of life" because advocates of euthanasia use the term to suggest that life is not worth living. The guidelines say, "While illness and other circumstances can make life very difficult, they cannot diminish the inestimable worth of each human life created by God." How can one individual presume to judge the quality of another's life?

HHS demands all health plans cover abortion

On January 20, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reaffirmed its rule that virtually all private health care plans must cover sterilization, abortifacients, and contraception. Non-profit religious employers have one year to comply.

Responding to the announcement, Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "In effect, the President is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences." The Obama administration "has now drawn an unprecedented line in the sand." Dolan urged that the HHS mandate be overturned.

ACTION REQUESTED: Contact members of Congress with the following message: Please co-sponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, H.R. 1179 in the House and S. 1467 in the Senate. This measure will ensure that citizens keep the right to provide, purchase, or enroll in health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions.

Contact members of the U.S. House and Senate through e-mail, phone calls or FAX. Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121, or call the local offices of your Congressman and Senators. Full contact information can be found at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

Remember to speak as individuals, not as Catholic Daughters.

More government funding of embryonic stem cells

In December the National Institutes of Health announced federal funding for three more lines of embryonic stem cells. Ironically, the federal government is adding funds when private drug companies are abandoning research on embryonic stem cells because it doesn't work.

The drug company Geron was the first company approved to run trials using embryonic stem cells to treat spinal cord injuries, but the company announced in November that it was stopping its embryonic stem cell research program.

“Its decision was due to the hard facts of economics: There's no market for a product that doesn't work!” said Chuck Colson writing at Breakpoint.org. “...for years we've been told that the use of embryonic stem cells, which destroy human embryos—that is, people—will lead to miracle cures for all kinds of diseases and conditions. The problem for embryonic stem cell advocates is that they failed to produce a single cure.”

Although private companies have realized that embryonic stem cells don't result in any cures, the federal government continues putting taxpayer funds into this barbaric and unprofitable research.

Adult stem cells, produced without destroying embryos, continue to show promise and are already being used to treat more than 70 diseases and medical conditions ranging from skin cancer to Lou Gehrig's disease.

Prayer of the Elderly, Bl. Pope John Paul II,

Grant, O Lord of life, that we may savor every season of our lives as a gift filled with promise for the future.

Grant that we may lovingly accept your will, and place ourselves each day in your merciful hands. And when the moment of our definitive “passage” comes, grant that we may face it with serenity, without regret for what we shall leave behind.

For in meeting you, after having sought you for so long, we shall find once more every authentic good which we have known here on earth, in the company of all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith and hope.

Mary, Mother of pilgrim humanity, pray for us “now and at the hour of our death.” Keep us ever close to Jesus, your beloved Son and our brother, the Lord of life and glory. Amen!

Some US immunizations use cells from abortions

Immunization rates in the United States are falling for a number of reasons, one of them being an ethical dilemma. The issue is that several common vaccines use cell lines from elective abortions. In “Ethics in Vaccine Development & Production: Transforming Health Care,” the Catholic Medical Association discussed the issue in depth.

While recognizing the importance of childhood immunizations in reducing death, disease and suffering, parents are asking if they are obliged to accept vaccines for their children if they object in conscience to the way the vaccines were made.

Dr. John F. Brehemy wrote, “In the United States, vaccines for hepatitis A, (some) rabies, rubella, chicken pox, (varicella), shingles, and bivalent or trivalent combinations of these (such as MMR), depend on human diploid cell lines derived from elective abortions for their development and ongoing production.”

“Catholic institutions and providers are well-positioned to help make alternative vaccines available in a timely manner,” he continues. “Safe, effective alternatives for all vaccines (except for varicella) already exist in Europe or Japan. By using the purchasing power they possess, Catholic health care institutions and providers could quickly create a ‘market’ for alternative vaccines that pharmaceutical companies could not ignore. Finally, this same market power, combined with professional and political pressure, could help persuade pharmaceutical companies to develop alternative cell lines for many future vaccines.”

Brehemy concludes “Taken together, these efforts could not only transform current trends in medical research and therapy, but future developments as well.” Here's the website to read more: http://www.cathmed.org/issues_resources/educational_resources/print/ethics_in_vaccine_development_production_transforming_health_care/

A reminder: Political year guidelines

Because of tax-exempt status, Catholic Daughters of the Americas cannot and does not endorse or support any political party or political candidate at federal, state or local levels, including judicial nominees. Since our organization does take stands on issues, it is appropriate to research past votes on issues and to inform members of how elected officials have voted.

Approved: Joanne Tomassi, National Regent