Oregon Legislators promote Euthanasia Bill

by Jane Marnchianes

Senator Frank Roberts is planning on introducing a bill which would legalize assisted suicide so that physicians can administer lethal doses of medications to their terminally ill patients upon request. This bill has been given much publicity but it is receiving relatively little support so far and inside sources at the Capitol in Salem are stating privately that there is not much of a chance that it will be enacted into law.

Two years ago starvation and dehydration of certain categories of patients became legal in Oregon. In certain instances, you can be starved and dehydrated to death in Oregon against your will...

The bill you have probably not heard of is Senate Bill 494 which is being sponsored by Senators Shoemaker, Bradbury, Cease, Cohen, Fawbush, Hamby, Hannon, J. Hill, Kitzhaber, Otto, Roberts, Smith, Springer, and Trow at the request of the Bio-Ethics Taskforce of the Center for Ethics in Health Care and Oregon Health Decisions. This bill would further extend euthanasia by omission laws in Oregon. Two years ago starvation and dehydration of certain categories of patients became legal in Oregon. In certain instances, you can be starved and dehydrated to death in Oregon against your will even if you have never signed a durable power of attorney or living will.

Senate Bill 494 is currently being rewritten and apparently its focus will be on the starvation and dehydration of patients such as Nancy Cruzan even if they have not stated that they wanted food and fluids withheld. There is much evidence that such legislation across the country is economically motivated. Dr. Ronald Cranford, a neurologist who has testified on the pro-death side of right-to-die cases across the country, has stated that a person in a persistent vegetative state has no civil rights or constitutional protection, especially in this period of limited resources.

Our Judeo-Christian heritage has always had reverence for the sanctity of life. Consider the remarks of Archbishop Dionigi Tettamanci, president of the Italian Bishops Commission for the Family: "Passive euthanasia—it could be better called omissive—is the procuring of one's own death or the death of another by omitting care which is indispensable for the survival of the person."

Concerning Nancy Cruzan, he stated: "De facto her death was procured by the suspension of nutrition." He believes that food and fluids are basic care whether you are temporarily or irreversibly unable to communicate, and even if you have never been able to communicate.

Senate bill 494...would further extend euthanasia by omission laws in Oregon.

Please call your individual legislators in the House and Senate at the following toll-free number: 1-800-327-7389, or write to them at the State Capitol Building, Salem, Oregon 97310. Urge them to vote "No" on SB 494—no compromise.

For more information, call: Oregonians for Patients' Rights, 289-6152.

Acknowledgement: Many thanks to Mr. Walter Weber, Associate Counsel, Free Speech Advocates, a pro-life legal defense project, for his invaluable analyses through the years. ■

Advocates for Life, Oregon Update

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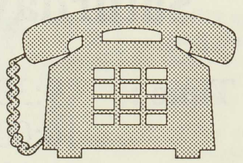

HOT LINE

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Message updated three times per week, as events permit.

Busalacchi

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and recommendations:

...[T]he patient was coherent, responsive, and recognized that I was a stranger and responded differently to me than she did to the staff. She smiled and laughed in an appropriate manner, she followed simple requests, she opened her mouth and partially turned her head upon request. She responded appropriately and apprehensive[ly] to most portions of the examination which caused discomfort.

Christine is definitely not in a persistent vegetative state in my opinion...She is conscious, she is aware, she is learning to speak and follow verbal requests.

Based upon her clinical course she is likely to live for years...and her present skills have shown improvements and one might expect further improvement in the future.

In my opinion it would not be in the best interest of Christine Busalacchi to move her from the facility [where] she is presently located. That said movement, in my opinion, would cause irreparable damage and harm including the possibility of death.

It is my opinion that it would not be in the best interest of Christine Busalacchi to remove the nutrition/hydration tube at this time...

Christine Busalacchi as seen on video monitor. Videotapes show her responsive and alert.

...nurses who care for Christine daily have observed her smiling, turning her one good eye to meet the voice of a familiar nurse and grunting to indicate which soap opera she wants on her television.

In addition to Dr. Cantor's observations, nurses who care for Christine daily have observed her smiling, turning her one good eye to meet the voice of a familiar nurse and grunting to indicate which soap opera she wants on her television. Dr. Cranford, an avid advocate of euthanasia by starvation and dehydration, cavalierly dismisses the nurses' reports as "wishful thinking."

In response, Donald Lamkins asks whether people should listen to a doctor who spent less than an hour with the patient rather than nurses who have spent years with her.

Disability rights activist Jane Hoyt of the Nursing Home Action Group traveled to Mount Vernon from Minneapolis to consult with nurses and mobilize opposition to Mr. Busalacchi's deadly plan. Hoyt said, "I don't believe these people are hallucinating. They're professionals and for [Cranford] to say what he does is slander." *[Kansas City Star, 1/6/91.]*

Lamkins noted that Busalacchi has visited his daughter only seven times in the past two years, twice with television crews, and contends the man is interested in publicity and concerned about the financial strain the situation presents. Busalacchi claims that the emotional strain of seeing his daughter made visits increasingly difficult.

Mr. Busalacchi's motives are, however, not the main issue here. A vulnerable young woman's life is at stake. No one has the right to kill an innocent person regardless of her presumed "quality of life."

On January 16, Judge Louis Kohn of St. Louis Probate Court ruled that a family has the right to determine a patient's care, right or wrong, and granted Pete Busalacchi permission to move Christine. Busalacchi vowed to move his daughter as soon as possible to a Minneapolis hospital to be killed by dehydration, but when he appeared at the hospital on the 18th to move her, state attorneys hurriedly appealed Judge Kohn's ruling. Missouri Health Department Director Dr. John Bagby ordered that she not be moved because "I wasn't sure of our legal ground." [AP Wire Service, *Great Falls Tribune* (MT), 1/19/91.] What question Dr. Bagby has about the legal ground in this case is unimaginable. Missouri law requires clear and convincing evidence that a patient would refuse tube-feeding before it can be stopped. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld that policy. Christine's father admits that there is no such evidence.

"I know my daughter is damn full gone. One hundred percent gone." said Christine's father, Pete Busalacchi.

Donald Lamkins, the hospital administrator, said that the state would fight to prevent Busalacchi from moving Christine "as far as the legal system can go." [*Great Falls Tribune*, 1/19/91.] If so, perhaps she will be spared the cruel fate of Nancy Cruzan, who was, in the clinch, abandoned by the state of Missouri. Pray that those with the power to save Christine Busalacchi from being killed will stand firm this time. ■

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