

Testimony Against HD933

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Thank you, Delegates, for your service to our community. I am Nancy Weisman. I've lived in Maryland for over 30 years where I practice clinical psychology.

The following is a quote from the widely used medical school textbook, Principles of BioMedical Ethics, 4th ed, 1994:

“Rules in our moral code against actively causing the death of another person are not isolated fragments. They are threads in a fabric of rules that support respect of human life. The more threads we remove, the weaker the fabric becomes. If we also focus on the modification of attitudes, not rules only, the general attitude of respect for life can also be eroded by shifts in public policy. Prohibitions are often both instrumentally and symbolically important, and their removal could weaken a set of practices, restraints, and attitudes that we cannot replace.” Beauchamp and Childress, authors. p. 230

2400 years ago, universally accepted until about 40 years ago, the oath of Hippocrates forbid doctors killing patients, with or without patient's request. What is different now? Are doctors different? Are patients different? According to the bioethicists/philosophers, quoted above, what has changed is the medical technology has advanced to the point where we can achieve biological immortality - that is that the body, without the human essence, may live on indefinitely.

“... for treatment can preserve biological life indefinitely in many cases.” Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 1979, 1st ed., p.120

If nothing else we have learned from the COVID pandemic, we have learned that all of our medical technology cannot save us. There is no biological immortality.

Here we are changing our legal code - a public expression of our community values, impacting the entire community. Medicine and its' practitioners are still trusted - with our very lives. We saw their dedication and sacrifice during the pandemic. By making killing through medical channels legal - by means of medical decisions, and carried out by health care providers - **we remove important social and psychological barriers against killing**, and corrupt medicine, socially and scientifically and utterly destroy that trust remaining.

“If the moral center collapses, if physicians become killers or are even licensed to kill, the profession - and, therewith, each physician - will never again be worthy of **trust and respect as healer and comforter and protector of life in all its frailty.**” W.Gaylin, L.Kass, E. Pellegrino, M.Siegler. JAMA, 1988. Doctors must not kill.

The above quotation was in response to the anonymous report, “It’s Over, Debbie.” Published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1988, in which a doctors in-training confessed to deliberately overdosing a young cancer patient. The four authors, two still active, were doctors and bioethicists at major institutions.

They ended their articles, also published in JAMA, with this:

“We call on fellow physicians to say that we will not deliberately kill. We must also say to each of our fellow physicians that we will not tolerate killing of patients...we must say to the broader community that if it insists on tolerating or legalizing active euthanasia, it will have to find nonphysicians to do its killing.”

In Maryland, indirect medical killing - starvation, dehydration, asphyxiation - is already permitted and the consequences have been devastating. On the books, our medical killing promises to serve autonomy, and value quality of life and comfort. All of those promises have been broken.

The New England Journal of Medicine published a personal essay, “Death by Ableism,” which tells of two patients, Michael Hickson, and the author’s Uncle David, both disabled, both denied life-saving treatment and life sustaining food and water. The authorities, not the family, determined that Mr. Hickson and Uncle David had “no quality of life,” that is Hickson couldn’t walk or talk, and therefore shouldn’t “suffer” a feeding tube or a ventilator. By that standard, Stephen Hawkings had no quality of life, neither did authors Jean-Dominique Bauby (The diving bell and the butterfly book and movie) and Simon Fitzmaurice (It’s not dark yet. Book and movie). Are we a society which would give morphine and sit by while they died?

What is “ableism” if not utilitarianism, the basis of the Nazi medical killings. Who will judge some lives “unworthy of life?” When Melissa Hickson asked the doctor if he was

ok with killing, he replied, "We don't call it killing." Perhaps it's time to call the thing by its' name.

A right to chose is not a right to recruit accomplices. Sadly, it is all too easy to end one's life and all too hard to prevent someone from doing so.

Don't kill. Don't lie (primary cause is prescribed overdose; secondary cause - underlying disease).

Please **don't** pass this bill.