

“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.”

Principles of BioMedical Ethics, 4th ed, 1994, p. 230

Here we are changing our legal code - a public expression of our community values, impacting the entire community. By making killing through medical channels, by means of medical decisions, and carried out by health care providers **removes an important social and psychological barrier against killing**, corrupting medicine beyond recognition. Since Hippocrates, killing patients has been forbidden.

“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**.” Gaylin, Siegler, Pellegrino, Kass. JAMA, 1988. Doctors must not kill.

We, in Maryland indirect medical killing - starvation, dehydration, asphyxiation - is already permitted and the consequences have been devastating. On the books, our medical killing serves autonomy, quality of life, and comfort. But that is not what happens in the hospital, or even at home in hospice.

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, who were 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 Hawking 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)

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.

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