

Rebuttal: Is physician-assisted death in anyone's best interest?

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NO I completely agree with Dr Downar on his first 2 points, although I do not thoroughly follow his reasoning.¹ I can readily imagine circumstances in which it would appear to be in a person's best interest to be dead sooner rather than later, and I willingly concede that competent adults might be well positioned to determine when death is in their best interests.

However, I adamantly disagree that "*nobody's* interests are served by denying patients the right to physician-assisted death"¹ (italics added). This statement is as patently false as the subsequent implication that people oppose legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide simply to "prevent a rational person from pursuing his or her best interest."¹

Civil societies must necessarily place limits on individual freedoms for the benefit of the broader community. I am concerned, as all Canadians ought rightly to be, with everyone's interests. It is not in the interest of an enlightened society to legalize, normalize, and institutionalize the assisted suicide or mercy killing of competent, willing patients. Nor will it be in that society's interest, in a generation or two, when the normalization inevitably broadens to include incompetent and unknowing, if not necessarily unwilling (yet), patients.² Full stop.

(As I write, Oregon is considering a bill to loosen its restrictions on legalized killing, some apparently having already found the existing safeguards too limiting.²)

La traduction en français de cet article se trouve à www.cfp.ca dans la table des matières du numéro d'avril 2015 à la page e177.

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada did present and future Canadians a disservice by offering an embarrassingly broad "remedy" to an exaggerated and frighteningly misunderstood problem.³ Legalized killing cannot be the solution to medicalized living and dying.

Step up, doctors. And do not assume that there is any real moral distance between those of you who might be willing only to prescribe the lethal medications, and your colleagues who think themselves ready to push the plunger on the syringe. If you give a patient a pistol and ammunition, and teach her how to load and use the weapon, you will be less bloodied than if you pull the trigger yourself, but you will be no less complicit. 🍁

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Competing interests

None declared

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References

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These rebuttals are responses from the authors of the debates in the April issue (*Can Fam Physician* 2015;61:314-8 [Eng], 320-5 [Fr]).

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