

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Perception v. Reality

PERCEPTION:
Physical pain is the main reason for assisted suicide

REALITY

Intractable pain is not the leading cause.

Good palliative care can manage pain very effectively.

In Oregon in 2023, inadequate pain control was ranked 6th of reasons given for choosing assisted suicide, behind being a burden and "Less able to engage in activities".

PERCEPTION:
Assisted suicide is needed to guarantee a painless death

REALITY:

An assisted death is not peaceful and painless.

According to experts, the adverse effects of the lethal drugs used "include vomiting, myoclonus [muscle spasms] and a prolonged dying process of up to 47 hours".

Anaesthesiologist Dr Joel Zivot says: "I am quite certain that assisted suicide is not painless or peaceful or dignified...In the majority of cases, it is a very painful death."²

PERCEPTION:
Any assisted dying law would have stringent safeguards

REALITY:

Safeguards are progressively ignored and removed

- Canada will soon allow assisted suicide for mental health.
- California cut waiting periods from 15 days to 48 hours.
- Oregon has relaxed requirements on waiting times and residency and definitions of terminal illness.

PERCEPTION:
Assisted dying would be a free choice for people of sound mind

REALITY:

The vulnerable are put at risk

- People in Canada have qualified for assisted suicide because of homelessness, poverty or disability. Elsewhere, people with autism, anorexia, dementia and depression have qualified.
- Belgium and the Netherlands permit the non-voluntary euthanasia of **children**. Reports up to 2010 show that between 7%- 9% of all infant deaths involved euthanasia by lethal injection.³

PERCEPTION:
Legalisation would reduce suicide rates

REALITY:

Overall suicide rates go up

- Since legalisation in 2017, all suicides among older people in Victoria, Australia, increased by over 50%.⁴
- A 2015 study found that assisted suicide was linked to a 6.3% increase in total suicides and a 14.3% increase in the over 65s.⁵

1. The impact on general practice of prescribing assisted dying drugs", *BJGP Life*, 28 September 2021. 2. Joel Zivot, "Last rights: assisted suicide is neither painless nor dignified", *The Spectator*, 18 September 2021. 3. Gregory K Pike, Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide – When Choice is an Illusion and Informed Consent Falls, 2020. 4. David Albert Jones, "Did the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 Prevent "at least one suicide every week"?", 21 December 2023 *Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*, 11, pp 1-11. 5. D Jones, D Paton, "How Does Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide Affect Rates of Suicide?" (2015) *S Med J*, 108, 10 pp 599-604.