

From India

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To talk about the contentious issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide, it is necessary first to examine the purpose of the medical profession. It is now an irrefutable fact that medical science is all about maintaining a good quality of life. All treatment is therefore directed towards either relieving existing symptoms or preventing symptoms from occurring in future.

The scope of palliative care has expanded significantly to cover all symptomatic aspects of clinical conditions. It also offers support to the family members of the patient. Palliative care according to recent concepts includes palliative radiotherapy, palliative chemotherapy and palliative surgery as well. It includes relevant investigations required for better understanding and management of the distressing clinical complications. Under this broad umbrella is there a place for euthanasia? The answer, to a large extent, is governed by the social, religious and cultural ethos of a particular country.

In India, the care of the elderly, the sick and the dying in the family is considered an integral part of one's moral duties. In Hindu philosophy and religious tenets importance is given to sustaining life, and sickness and suffering are believed to be the quickest way of redeeming debt balances of bad actions of earlier births; whatever one may do, Karma's or deed's have to be re-compensated within this birth or the next or still thereafter. Therefore, shirking punishment ordained by the divinity

would not serve a concrete purpose. Most Hindus adhere to these tenets.

Euthanasia and assisted killing in any form has tremendous potential for misuse. The medical profession after all succumbs to the same temptations of bribery and corruption as the rest of society. Therefore, the given power to kill would be an unacceptable situation.

In a country like India, with grossly inadequate infrastructure for delivery of primary healthcare the question of providing 'assisted death' could have very far-reaching and dangerous implications.

Given the extremely low rate of literacy in India, the medico-legal documentation and bureaucracy that would be associated with legalized euthanasia becomes irrelevant and in the absence of such documentation euthanasia is nothing short of murder.

Euthanasia is against the Hippocratic oath. In my experience as a specialist in cancer pain and palliative care I do not recall a single incidence of a relative of a terminally ill patient requesting euthanasia. The relatives do their best for their patient and wish and pray that the person's sufferings be lessened and that he/she should depart as peacefully as possible.

In the context of relieving suffering and improving quality of life, the tremendous strides made in palliative care can not be overemphasized. Tender human loving care – assisted by modern medicines and methods – is the need of the hour not assisted killing.