

From Cyprus

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'Euthanasia' is a Greek word, meaning 'a good death'. The only good death recognized in Greek Orthodox ethics is that death in which the human person accepts the end of his or her life, in the spirit of moral and spiritual purity, in hope and trust in God and as a member of his kingdom.

This is not the same 'good death' the medical profession refers to when someone dies peacefully and symptom free. In fact, the Greek Orthodox Church goes further, affirming meaning to the act of suffering. 'It can be an experience providing purification, redemption and salvation. However, we do not encourage suffering – steps can and should be taken to alleviate suffering. Our religion teaches us to alleviate suffering, but you can not alleviate suffering by taking a life'. Orthodox Christian ethics rejects the wilful termination of life both by suicide and euthanasia and those who take their own lives are unable to be given a religious burial or placed with their families to rest in the same grave, which is the usual custom in Cyprus.

In Cyprus the majority of our patients belong to the Greek Orthodox Church and the position paper on euthanasia completed in October 2002 reflects the position of the Greek Orthodox Church, and thus in Cyprus it will be welcomed. Affirming life and regarding dying as a normal process, intending neither to hasten nor postpone death.

On a personal level though, we nurse patients with different values, beliefs and ideologies other than those of the Greek Orthodox Church. Paragraph 4.4 assumes that individuals requesting euthanasia should have access to palliative care expertise. We do know that even in the countries with the most developed palliative care network there are pockets that are not covered and even more so in countries like Cyprus, where palliative care is still developing. Our support network in the home and hospice are from voluntary organizations. There is very little support from social services and thus the family is left, often with a huge burden on the carer.

It is obvious that paragraph 4.7 clearly explores the potential for the misuse of euthanasia in any society and may be used to help support voluntary organizations to lobby the government and church who play an important role in Cypriot society to further develop and promote palliative care into mainstream healthcare.

This paper is clear, concise and affirms the way we currently work in Cyprus. We do look forward though, as I am sure do other developing countries, to the possibility of international policy through the EU (as discussed in the section Key issues) in order to improve existing services and provide a competent multidisciplinary palliative care workforce throughout the free areas of Cyprus.