Euthanasia in the Netherlands: balancing autonomy and compassion

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The Dutch Termination of Life-Act: what and when?

- Euthanasia is still a punishable offence under the Dutch Penal Code
- 2002: Dutch Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide Act passed
- Bottom-up: Codification of decades of discussion in society and medical profession
- It features the Dutch; History of striving for freedom, free will and conscience, tolerance

The Dutch: Principle of compassion

Moral justification for euthanasia

- The principle of respect for persons / respect for autonomy
- Acknowledgement of the autonomy and dignity of persons (cf Declaration of Geneva)
- Right to autonomous choice to end life: NO right to be assisted by others
- No right on euthanasia for patients, no obligation for physicians to perform euthanasia
- The 6 due care requirements for euthanasia

The need for appropriate End-of-Life-Care

- Appropriate, accessible, affordable End-of-Life-Care for all people is crucial
- Increase of palliative care in the Netherlands: the last years
- Euthanasia can be the last resort in the sequence of End-of-Life-Care
- Is not a therapeutic intervention nor “regular medical care”
- Does not undermine the trust in the physician-patient relationship
- Shows respect for patient’s autonomy, compassion, does not force care upon patient
Conclusion

- Euthanasia is a complex and controversial issue: it is not regular care
- Is based on the principles of respect for persons/autonomy and of compassion
- Justified if due care requirements are met & appropriate End-of-Life Care is available
- Transparency and supervision always needed

Different perspectives, same vocation

Thank you for your attention