

The Doctor Game – W. Gifford-Jones M.D.

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Just Say “NO” or Just Say “Yes”

Nancy Reagan, wife of Ronald Reagan former President of the United States, sent a direct, strong message to those who were tempted to take illegal drugs. Her advice was “Just say “NO”. So what has this message to do with the ongoing controversy about assisted death in Canada and the United States?

Quebec, a Roman Catholic province, has always been ahead of the rest of Canada in social change. Now it appears that it won't be too long before Quebec will be the first province to allow assisted death. But for the rest of Canada, those opposed to it, will use every legal measure to defeat this procedure. So is there any way that the two opposing forces, for and against assisted death, can ever be resolved?

The main argument used by those who vociferously oppose assisted death is that the slippery slope theory will prevail. Namely, that the infirm, elderly and those approaching death, and who do not want their life to be terminated, will have no say in the decision and be forced to have a lethal injection.

How could this scenario be prevented? Albert Einstein remarked that, “Explanations should be as simple as possible, but no simpler.” So can this continuing dilemma be made simpler?

Surely it doesn't take someone trained in bioethics, a psychologist or a spiritual leader to make this problem simpler. If there is one ounce of commonsense left in this country the only logical answer is the “NO or “YES” solution.

Let's assume that an individual is 100 percent against assisted death and wants to be assured it will never happen to him. Certainly there are enough lawyers who feel the same way to draft a binding legal document. It would state that under no circumstance could assisted death be used when an individual had signed such a document. In other words, a legal document that leaves no “Ifs” “Ands” or “Buts” in the decision.

If this legal document still failed to appease fears a simple hand or neck bracelet could be worn, similar to the “Do Not Resuscitate” one stating they refused assisted death.

So what about those who feel it is their right, and no one else’s right, to decide how they wish to end their lives. Here again a legal document could be made available which allows you to put your signature on the dotted line with no “If” “Ands” or “Buts.”

I believe Albert Einstein would agree this approach is simple, but not too simple. Politicians, doctors and religious organizations would not be able to deny the “YES” right to those who request it.

So what will happen? Probably not! As sure as night follows day the government will continue to waste millions of dollars on endless committee hearings. The money could be better spent on medical care.

But could Einstein and this medical journalist be wrong to expect a simple answer? In effect, those opposed to assisted death don’t want a simple answer or any answer. In the end assisted death is a religious issue claiming it cannot be condoned for anyone under any circumstances.

If that is the case those of us who wish to end our lives with the help of a physician are denied. And desperate people will continue to choose the alternative suicide. This is a tragic situation that no family should have to face.

As I’m a member of “Dignitas”, lethal injection is available to me in Switzerland if I ever need it. But in a democratic society what about those who cannot afford the one-way ticket?

It is unconscionable that assisted death should even be an issue when a simple “NO” or “YES” would suffice. Unfortunately, commonsense has become an uncommon commodity in North American society and this continues to prolong the agony of the dying. What do you think? For comments info@docgiff.com

It is also unconscionable that the organization “Dying With Dignity” has lost its charitable status which makes its operation more difficult.