

End-of-Life Care

Jos V.M. Welie, PhD

Background Considerations

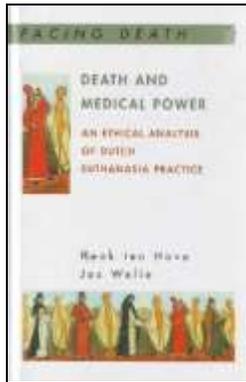
Today, we are able to keep ever more people alive for ever longer periods of time, in spite of serious life-threatening illnesses. These advances in biomedical science and clinical care have also evoked urgent and difficult ethical and legal questions. Ever more people appear to fear the prospect of their lives being extended for prolonged periods of time and the call for euthanasia and PAS stays very loud. In some jurisdictions (States of Oregon, Washington, Montana and Vermont, Quebec, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg) PAS and/or euthanasia has already been decriminalized. However, this solution to the ethical problems is rather odd: Instead of terminating the problem (i.e., medical interventions that are experienced as harmful by patients), and improving the patient's quality of life, life itself is terminated.

Approaches

End-of-life care entails many different ethical questions such as the moral status of life-extending technologies, the strengths and weaknesses of living wills, the desirability of legal control over the medical profession, and the definition of death. Dr. Welie has been examining these issues for the past 25 years. Currently, he is focusing on the particular ideals of a good life at the end of life that often remain implicit yet heavily influence ethical and legal standards and policies. Of particular concern are ideals that emphasize youthfulness, autonomy and independence, thereby denying the very condition of aging and the physical and/or mental disablement that may occur.

Framing the Question

How can we provide health care at the end-of-life that benefits patients, supports families, and thereby prevents the call for assisted suicide and euthanasia? Specifically, what are the values, rights and ethical principles that underlie and guide such a practice of compassionate care?



Have, Henk AMJ & Welie, Jos VM: *Death and Medical Power. An Ethical Analysis of the Dutch Euthanasia Practice*. London: Open University Press, 2005.
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Selected Publications

Welie, Jos V.M. & Have, Henk.A.M.J ten: The Ethics of Forgoing Life-Sustaining Treatment: Theoretical Considerations and Clinical Decision Making. *Multidisciplinary Respiratory Medicine* 2014, 9: 14-22.

Have, Henk.A.M.J ten & Welie Jos VM. Palliative Sedation Versus Euthanasia: An Ethical Assessment. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2013. Advance Epublication from 2013 Jun 4. At: S0885-3924(13)00235-2. doi: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2013.03.008. Print version: 2014, 47(1):123-36.

Welie, Jos V.M. Pitfalls of Legal Regulation to Improve End-of-Life Care. The Example of Artificial Nutrition and Hydration. *Online Journal of Healthcare Ethics* 6,10 (2010) 1-26. ([Available online](#))

Welie, Jos V.M. (2006/2002). An educational guide on end-of-life care law and public policy in Nebraska. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Coalition for Compassionate Care. (2006 edition available online)

Welie, Jos V.M. When Medical Treatment is no Longer in Order. Towards a new interpretation of the ordinary-extraordinary distinction. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, 5,3 (2005) 517-536.

Current Issues

In all places where euthanasia and assistance in suicide has been legalized, the power to do so has become the prerogative of physicians. And yet it has never been convincingly argued why this should be so. At present, a new movement in the Netherlands is seeking to push this envelop, trying to attain legal acceptance of lay assistance in suicide. This development has once more brought to the foreground the paradox between the most common justification of euthanasia in terms of the autonomy of the patient versus the attempts of the medical profession to hold on to its monopoly on the practice thereof.

Education

Dr. Welie offers two courses in end-of-life care. HPE414/MHE614, "Ethical aspects of end-of-life care", which is an on-line course offered as an elective to senior medical students, and to students in CHPE's Master in Health Care Ethics program and other interested graduate students.

MHE 612, "Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on End of Life", is an upper-level graduate course offered as an elective to students in CHPE's Master in Health Care Ethics.

Dr. Welie also guest lectures on the ethics of end-of-life care in the medical and occupational therapy degree programs.