

Forum United Nations Commissions on Science and Technology for Development UNCSTD

Issue #2: Addressing the ethical concerns towards the usage of euthanasia machines

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Introduction

As society becomes more technically advanced, it's becoming increasingly difficult to integrate the practice of euthanasia with the ethical concerns surrounding machines that can end a life. With the advancement in medical technology, there is a wider public discussion about whether or not euthanasia machines should be developed. Such machines have called upon a lot of interest recently, especially after some high profile cases where an individual ended their own life using such a machine.

Different practices are classified as "euthanasia." The following are some distinctions that distinguish various versions: Active euthanasia, killing a patient using active measures, such as injecting a deadly amount of a medicine. Passive euthanasia is the intentional removal of artificial life support such as a ventilator or feeding tube from a patient. Voluntary euthanasia, with the patient's consent. Involuntary euthanasia, euthanasia performed without the patient's agreement, such as when the patient is unconscious and his or her desires are unknown. Some ethicists differentiate between "involuntary" (against the patient's wishes) and "nonvoluntary" (without the patient's consent but

wishes are unknown). Physician-assisted suicide: "Physician-assisted suicide" refers to active, voluntary euthanasia in which a physician supplies the patient with the means, such as enough drugs, so that the patient kills himself or herself.

Some people believe these machines could help reduce the number of elderly people who suffer from unbearable pain, while others are concerned that they could be abused. Euthanasia machines raise many ethical concerns that need to be addressed before they become reality. Currently, there is no clear consensus on how such machines should be used and this poses challenges for them to gain approval from regulatory bodies. In order to reap the benefits of such developments while mitigating the risks, it will be important for society to come up with a clear policy on when and how euthanasia machines should be used.

Definition of Key Terms

Euthanasia: Practice which is illegal in most countries involving the painless killing of a patient who suffers from an incurable and painful disease or in an irreversible coma.

Euthanasia Machines: Devices and technologies developed specifically designed to facilitate the act of assisted suicide often through the delivery of lethal medications or interventions.

Assisted Suicide: The act of providing an individual with the assistance to end their own life.

Right to die: The concept of which individuals have a personal right to choose when and how they die particularly in the cases of physical and mental suffering.

Legal Status: The standing of a particular practice such as euthanasia or assisted

suicide under the law. The legal status can differ depending on each country and jurisdiction and can range from being legalized to prohibited.

Medical ethics: The values and the principles that guide the performance of medicine in order to ensure full respect for the patients autonomy and well-being.

Sanctity of life: The belief that human life has inherent value and should be protected by all means. This is often connected to religious backgrounds.

General Overview

The usage of euthanasia machines is designed for the purpose of ending a person's life to relieve them from suffering, most commonly due to an incurable illness or unendurable physical pain. The usage of these assisted suicide machines has been an ongoing controversial topic for a long period of time, due to a wide range of concerns. All concerns relating to this topic revolves around the moral permeability and implications of ending a person's life with a full intention. The main central concern that raises the attention of many opinions is the question of whether it is morally correct to end a person's life in a volunteer way even if they are indeed suffering and there is most likely no hope of recovery. The main central ethical issues that tie within this issue mostly fall into different categories of legal, ethical, religious, medical and abuse concerns.

Legal status of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

The usage of these assisted suicide machines are illegal in many different countries. For instance, when looking at Europe, the procedures carrying out this type of peaceful death is prohibited. However, there are a few exceptions of countries that do legalize the usage of these practices. Some countries in

Europe that have legalized the usage include Luxembourg(2009), Switzerland (1942), The Netherlands (2002) and Belgium (2002). In the United States, the legal status of the usage of Euthanasia machines varies by state. For instance, states such as Washington (2008), and New Jersey (2019) have legalized its usage under a lot of strict conditions. However, although some of these states have permitted the usage, it's safe to say that the majority of the United states has not and therefore the practices of Euthanasia overall remain illegal at the federal level from a broad perspective.

Risk of Misusages

The participation of those who specialize in medicine and who carry out medical procedures raises concerns about the relationship between the doctor and patient relationship, mostly due to the possible contradiction towards one of the most ethical codes in the medical field which is the Hippocratic Oath. The Hippocratic oath is a promise that doctors make to always do their best to help and heal their patients, as well as to ensure to keep the patient's information private. Medical professionals commit to this code in which they are expected to fulfill specific ethical standards to not harm the patient. However, simply by using these machines involves the idea of intentionally ending the patient's life which contradicts the code. Additionally, many people believe this could be thought of as a potential for abuse, referring to concerns of these machines being misused. Additionally, as Euthanasia machines become more and more advanced due to technology advancement, there exists the potential for misuse or abuse of these specific devices, as authorized individuals may have the ability gain access to these machines which could produce negative outcomes and consequences.

Religious Perspectives

Religion also plays a significant role when determining the ethicality of the usage of euthanasia machines. Generally, many religious groups express strong opposition towards these types of practices as they believe that only from a higher authority such as god has the choice of determining the time and place of one's death. It is widely believed that the following of these practices is a violation of God's will. Overall, though there is a diversity within the religious aspects of these practices, the majority of religious groups do express a side of opposition.

Beliefs of Advocates

Advocates of the usage of these machines argue that killing the patients in question is not worse than letting them die. These advocates claim that patients should have their own decision and right to choose what they want to do with their own lives. They assert that patients and these individuals should have autonomy over their lives including their own personal rights to make end of life decisions regarding their own body. Many advocates additionally argue that patients who are long term suffering from this mental and physical type of pain should have a personal option to die with dignity especially in severe type cases where their current illnesses and conditions have caused significant consequences of proper cognitive functions or a list of the other severe impairments in which it is more preferable to die peacefully rather than enduring a long suffering life.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Switzerland

Switzerland has not only legalized these machines to the point where they were normalized, but are developing “3D pod” that assists with suicide. The pod works by having high levels of nitrogen which reduces oxygen levels rapidly, the process takes around 10 minutes and has an emergency button just in case. The use of this pod is in current legal debate regarding the Swiss laws.

USA

Assisted suicide and euthanasia laws vary by state in the USA. Some states have legalized these assisted suicide machines under specific strict conditions, however it is not legal across the majority of the country, therefore the practices of Euthanasia overall remain illegal at the federal level from a broad perspective.

Belgium

Over 27,000 people have died from euthanasia in Belgium since it was legalized 20 years ago on 28th May 2002, according to the latest official data from Belgian authorities. Though euthanasia was initially legalized under narrow, “strict conditions”, updates to the law have seen Belgium become the first and only country in the world to have no lower age limit enforced for children.

Luxembourg

The Luxembourg law on euthanasia and assisted suicide allows patients to die when their suffering becomes unbearable. As a result, patients in this condition have the choice to choose how their life will end, and doctors who agree to comply with their request for euthanasia or assisted suicide are not prosecuted. Indeed, strict legal requirements exist to ensure the transparency and control of medical procedures to end life voluntarily.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands was the first country in the world to legalize euthanasia suicide, introducing preliminary legislation in 1994, followed by a fully developed law in 2002. The practice has been tolerated, however, since 1985.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1996:	Dr. Philip Nitschke, an Australian physician, designs the first assisted suicide device called the "Deliverance Machine."
2006:	A Swiss non-profit organization, Dignitas, begins offering assisted suicide services using their "Thanatron" machine, which delivers lethal drugs.
2008:	Dr. Jack Kevorkian, an American pathologist and advocate for assisted suicide, designs a machine called the "Mercitron" which he claimed could deliver a painless death to terminally ill patients.
2010:	The Netherlands introduces the "Thanatron II," a more advanced version of the original machine used by Dignitas, which allows patients to self-administer lethal drugs.
2011:	The first euthanasia machine was introduced in the United States by Dr. Philip Nitschke's organization, Exit International. The machine, called the "Sarco," uses liquid nitrogen to induce hypoxia, a lack of oxygen, leading to a painless death.
2012	A Swiss company, Minelli AG, develops a new assisted suicide machine called the "Sarco 2.0," which uses a similar hypoxia-inducing process as the Sarco.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The World Medical Association Declaration was adopted in the year of 1987. This declaration assists in affirming that the usage of Euthanasia machines is unethical and is in opposition to the role of physicians of assisting as a cure and healer. The message included in the declaration states that the international taking of another person's life, even with the other person's request, cannot be justified on the grounds of compassion. The UN has also shown involvement relating to this issue. For instance, in the year of 1948, The UN Universal Declaration of human rights (UDHR) recognized the human right and believed this includes the right to freedom from any cruel, torture, or inhumane punishments and treatment. These provisions as well have implications for the use of euthanasia machines as they highly raise questions and doubt about if they play a role in violating these basic human rights requirements. In the year 2015, The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution mainly focusing on Euthanasia, whose purpose is to ensure that medical decisions are taken in place with proper accordance and in a manner with respect to the law. In the year of 2016, The UN High-level Panel on access to medicines released a report which highlighted the necessity of ensuring patients undergoing any type of treatment in a physical or mental aspect have access to appropriate treatments and pain management and that they are not forced to follow the path of using the Enthunaida machines due to the lack of those services.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Previous attempts to resolve these issues based mostly on legal and regulatory structures. In countries where euthanasia is legal, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, restrictions have been put in place to ensure that

euthanasia is only performed under specific conditions and under the supervision of a physician. Euthanasia is banned in other nations, including the United States, in certain states of the US they have approved physician-assisted suicide, which permits terminally ill individuals to receive drugs to end their life. As well, there have been initiatives to create moral guidelines for the use of these suicidal devices. An example is when a group of professionals in 2017 created the SARCO SUICIDE POD, a type of pod that can be assembled anywhere in the world through 3D printing. This device provides people with a way to suicide through increasing levels of nitrogen to the point where oxygen is not running through their body. To guarantee that this device is only used in such situations, researchers created ethical guidelines so that a patient can only use it in specific scenarios, like suffering from a terminal illness.

Possible Solutions

With the rising concerns towards the usage of euthanasia machines due to advances being made with technology it is essential to address the concerns and highlight possible solutions which could be made. The government could play an essential role in developing clear regulations and guidelines which are associated with its usage including requirements for proper informed consent, clear safeguards with the purpose of preventing any intended forms of abuse. Educating the public and making them well aware of the ethical concerns towards the usage of these machines

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

SDG #9: This goal aims at promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. Through the evolution of these types of

“good deaths” in different forms, and creation of new machines like the Sarco Pods, innovation is being fostered.

SDG #16: This goal emphasizes the importance of human rights and the rule of law while promoting peaceful and just communities. The use of euthanasia machines has to be addressed by its ethical concerns, this must be done with the law and with respect for human rights, and patients' rights have to be respected and prioritized.

Appendix

A. <https://care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide/arguments-for-and-against-assisted-suicide-and-euthanasia>

1. This link offers a perspective from the viewpoints of the arguments which support and discourage the usage of Euthanasia machines. It allows an individual to examine the viewpoints and explore both sides to gain a better understanding of the controversial topic.

B. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/15/nitschke-suicide-machine-amsterdam-euthanasia-funeral-fair>

2. This link provides in context information about what Euthansia machines are for those who have little knowledge of what they are used for and what they do. This is useful as it is essential to understand the subject of what the debate will be about.

C. <https://philarchive.org/archive/LEAEA-2>

3. This link additionally also provides context about the usage of Euthansia machines and how growing technology and includes context of how the

development of AI has led to the point of which it could be used to make life and death decisions.

I. Maps

a. <https://www.statista.com/chart/28133/assisted-dying-world-map/>

1. This resource shows a map where it outlines the places in the world which are both for and against the usage of euthanasia machines. It shows what percentage of the world allows for this assisted technology for usage of taking a life away.

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