

FACTSHEET 11: The Fear of Abuse Objection

OBJECTION 6 - Any law permitting voluntary euthanasia would be liable to abuse because either:

1. Relatives or others could collude with the doctor to murder the patient for financial gain or to be rid of a nuisance, or
2. Patients could be, or could feel, pressured to ask for euthanasia when they really wish to go on living.

Answer 1: The possibility of collusion to murder a frail, elderly and perhaps fatally ill patient (or even to falsify the diagnosis) already exists. It would not be increased when voluntary euthanasia is legalised because of the requirement for a second independent medical opinion and a detailed report.

Answer 2: Legalised voluntary euthanasia would not be euthanasia on demand, but based on very careful medical assessment. Doctors would have to be satisfied that the patient's condition was, for the patient, intolerable. They would also be required to assess whether a patient's request was free as well as enduring. The open discussion among those concerned (significant others and health care workers) that would be part of this process would provide sound protection.

Further Points:

- Doctors have no vested interest, professional or financial, in the death of a patient. On the contrary, they make their living and gain professional satisfaction from maintaining the health and well being of their patients for as long as practicable.
- A desire not to be a burden on the State or one's loved ones is a legitimate concern, and should not be mistaken as evidence of abuse.
- Medically supervised voluntary euthanasia under guidelines endorsed by the High Court was available in the Netherlands from 1984 until legislation was enacted in 2002. These guidelines were laid down by the Royal Dutch Medical Association at the request of the court. Three investigations concerning the end of life commissioned by the Dutch government in 1990, 1995 and 2001 show no support for the claim that the Netherlands law is on a slippery slope to abuse.