

# Should Euthanasia be Legalized in New Zealand?

By Kelly McCammon

**‘What are the implications for registered nurses if euthanasia is legalized in New Zealand?’**

## Introduction

The controversial topic of euthanasia often overlooks the great implications that would occur for nurses if it was to become legalised in New Zealand. According to Maher (2012), legalising the use of euthanasia and assisted suicide (AS) would put both nurses and vulnerable patients at risk. Nurses are faced with a dilemma, with conflicting feelings between the patient's right to choose (autonomy), and the nurse's ethical duty of care based on the principles of beneficence (to do good) and non-maleficence (to do no harm).



image one retrieved from  
<http://stphilipneriparish.ca/blog/entry/euthanasia-and-assisted-suicide-presentation.html>

## Why some nurses support euthanasia

Nurses, like the rest of society, hold a range of views regarding the use of euthanasia and AS. According to research there are four main reasons as to why some nurses may support legalising AS. They include:

- believing people have the right to make autonomous decisions on their end-of-life care.
- respecting patient dignity and believing they have the right to avoid unnecessary pain and suffering at the end-of-life.
- doctors and nurses personal or professional experiences of witnessing severe suffering at end-of-life.
- a perceived failure of some health professionals to acknowledge medical futility, resulting in suffering through prolonging people's lives (Oliver, Wilson & Malpas, 2017a).

**67% of nurses' support legalizing assisted suicide in New Zealand.** The support is possibly due to nurses being the close carers in many end-of-life situations, building therapeutic relationships and observing the reality of suffering and pain, and witnessing the patients diminished quality of life (Letters, 2016).

## Why some nurses are opposed to euthanasia

According to Oliver, Wilson and Malpas (2017a), there are four primary reasons why doctors and nurses may be opposed to legalising AS. They include:

- a belief that the task is not a designated role for health professionals.
- a belief that vulnerable people may be pressured to end their lives unwillingly and prematurely.
- professional experience with and/or a belief in effective palliative care.
- a moral and/or ethical objection to the legalisation of assisted suicide.

Another issue is the direct personal impact (emotionally, professionally, spirituality and psychologically) on the doctors and nurses involved in the process. Professionally, their job is to prevent premature death and actively address suffering, but they may be asked to assist patients to die. The impact of this request can be profound and long-lasting and may result in medical professionals feeling burnt out due to the emotional burden (Macleod, Wilson & Malpas, 2012).

## References

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## Recommendations

- ❖ Nurses should have the right to not be subjected to nursing practice that conflicts their ethical, moral or religious beliefs. A clause needs to be stipulated in the guidelines that state that registered nurses have the choice to opt-out of participating (Ritchie, 2016).
- ❖ It is important that support is available to provide emotional and psychological support to nurses that choose to be involved in the dying process. Therefore, prior to legalising the use of euthanasia in New Zealand, support services such as counselling should be implemented for both nurses and doctors to access.
- ❖ Implement changes to legislation, so that nurses are not at risk of prosecution (Oliver, Wilson, & Malpas, 2017b).

## Conclusion

Literature suggests that there is increasing support for AS and/or euthanasia to become legalised in New Zealand, however, there is limited discussion as to how the change would affect registered nurses. Literature acknowledges that nurses hold their own ideas and beliefs about euthanasia and It is apparent that there are multiple issues that need to be addressed and changes that need to be implemented to ensure the safety of both Registered Nurses and the general public is maintained.



Summary

I chose to produce a poster for this topic as it is a beneficial way of acknowledging and promoting the clinical issue to a large audience. A poster is a visually appealing way to gain attention and expose the topic of euthanasia. According to Taggart and Arslanian (2000), a poster is an effective way of presenting knowledge from research. Furthermore, the design of the poster determines the impact that the information has on the audience. My target audience is the general public as well as health care professionals, in an attempt for them to consider the impact the potential legalisation of euthanasia will have on registered nurses, and the implications that may arise if issues are not addressed and implemented prior to a potential law change. It is possible that in order to pass the bill in parliament to legalise the use of euthanasia, that New Zealander's may have to vote. It is for this reason that it is important that all New Zealander's are aware of the impact that this could have on the registered nurses in New Zealand.

PICOT

PICOT is a framework tool used to create a clinical question by refining a broad topic in to a more specific search question (Schneider & Whitehead, 2016). Initially, I began with the broad question of 'should euthanasia be legalised in New Zealand'. After extensively researching the topic and analysing the literature that was available, I refined my question to -

*'What are the implications for registered nurses if euthanasia is legalised in New Zealand'*

The reason I decided to pursue the topic of euthanasia was because during my training as a student nurse, I have had two placements based in an oncology ward, where I witnessed first-hand patients suffering in the end stages of their life. On a daily basis, the registered nurses on the ward cared for patients struggling with severe pain and major side- effects as a result of advanced cancer. This made me interested in the topic of euthanasia as it may become an option in the future for people suffering from a terminal illness, such as cancer and would impact my practice as a future registered nurse.

Picot Category	Information relating to question	Explanation
Population	The population I am researching are registered nurses based in New Zealand.	The potential legalisation of euthanasia in New Zealand would produce both personal and professional issues for nurses. I am wanting to research the implications that would occur and how nurses feel about the proposed change.
Intervention	I will explore research that aims to gather the feelings and views of nurses regarding legalising euthanasia in New Zealand as well as outline the implications that may occur as a result.	Nurses are often overlooked in the debate regarding euthanasia. I am interested to ascertain their views and feelings on the topic.
Comparison	I will compare the reasons behind why people are both supportive and opposed to the change.	The aim is to gain an understanding of the reasons behind why nurses and organisations are pro or against euthanasia.
Outcome	The aim of this research is to acknowledge potential implications for nurses if euthanasia is legalised, in order for changes to be made to protect them.	By exploring various research articles I want to find out the consequences for nurses and how they feel regarding the proposed change in legislation. It is important for nurses to have a voice and to acknowledge their feelings.
Time	N/A	N/A

References

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