

# Euthanasia For The Terminally Ill

## Why Do Terminally Ill Patients Consider Euthanasia?

Figure 1. Nurse & patient (American Traveler, n.d.)

### Introduction

The controversial issue of euthanasia has been a topic of discussion for many years in New Zealand. However, currently it is extremely relevant because of the parliamentary bill that is presently being debated which would legalise assisted dying - the "End of Life Choice Bill" (New Zealand Legislation, 2017). Euthanasia has been legalised in many countries worldwide providing New Zealand with trialed and proven research to allow for successful implementation of the practice (Dees, Vernooij-Dassen, Van Weel, 2010).

### Literature Review and Implications

Terminal illness is the final stages of a non-curable disease with a short life expectancy (Harris, Nagy & Vardaxis, 2014). There are numerous reasons why a terminally ill patient may consider euthanasia however, suffering is a significant motivator (Dees et al., 2010).

#### **Intrinsic factors**

- ♦ Physical - there are a multitude of physical symptoms associated with different terminal illnesses that greatly impact on suffering and can lead to euthanasia requests (Dees et al., 2010).
- ♦ Mental - patients can have debilitating effects on their mental wellbeing including; impaired concentration, memory loss, speech difficulties and reduced mental faculties (Ruijs, Van Der Wal, Kerkhof, Onwuteaka-Philipsen, 2014).
- ♦ Emotional - depression nearing the end of a person's life has been seen to be a key motivating factor for euthanasia (Ruijs et al., 2014).
- ♦ Spiritual - a lack of autonomy and dignity at the end of life can lead to feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness (Dees et al., 2010).

#### **Extrinsic factors**

- ♦ Family - patients can feel as though they are burdening their loved ones with the impacts of their disease (Dees et al., 2010).
- ♦ Social - sickness can bring social isolation and the removal of societal roles (Dees et al., 2010).

#### **Implications**

Negative: there is a "slippery slope debate" which suggests that if euthanasia was to be legalised then other unethical acts may be supported under the same principles (Lewis, 2007).

Positive: beneficence (the act of doing good) and autonomy (allowing independence) are key ethical principles that impact nurses opinions on euthanasia (NZNO, 2010). In regard to the implementation of euthanasia practice, these guiding nursing principles emphasise patients thoughts and wishes allowing nurses to carry out these important responsibilities.

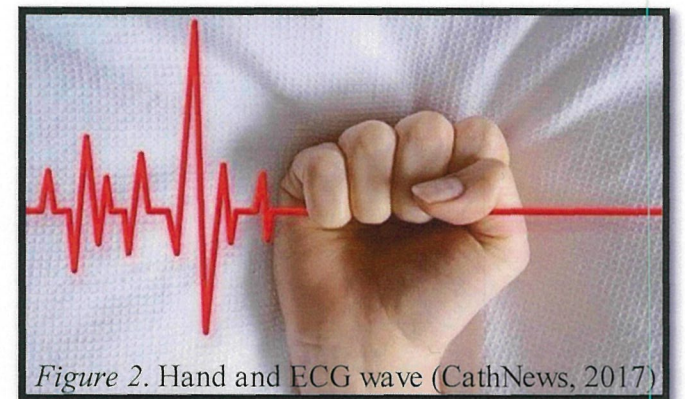


Figure 2. Hand and ECG wave (CathNews, 2017)

### Recommendation

**Legalise assisted dying in New Zealand and ultimately implement full euthanasia practice.**

Once assisted dying has been legalised, then assessing the efficacy of it would provide the opportunity to develop practices before the full implementation of euthanasia. This would be done with strict guidelines and trained professionals to maintain safe standards of practice.

### Conclusion

All aspects of a person's wellbeing, intrinsic and extrinsic, show the many important reasons why people may consider euthanasia. The positive implications would give nurses the opportunity to work within the code of ethics maintaining their professionalism. By providing this information to the public, it reignites the euthanasia discussion allowing society to make fully informed decisions on their stance on euthanasia.

### **References:**

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**Rationale:**

I chose to do my submission in the form of a poster to inform the public and healthcare professionals of the important reasons why the terminally ill consider euthanasia. This information is so significant because of the potential law changes occurring in New Zealand. The “End of Life Choice Bill” is currently being debated in parliament and would legalise assisted dying in New Zealand (New Zealand Legislation, 2017). This is the first time a bill of this nature has passed its’ first reading and it is currently with the select committee (New Zealand Parliament, 2017; New Zealand Legislation, 2017). By informing the public about the considerations and reasons for euthanasia it will give them the opportunity to establish fully informed opinions. This topic is of significant debate within New Zealand society and therefore, providing relevant research may change people’s perceptions of euthanasia allowing further societal acceptance.

**References:**

New Zealand Legislation. (2017). End of Life Choice Bill. Retrieved from <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/member/2017/0269/latest/whole.html#DLM7285905>

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| PECOT Category         | Information Relating to Question               | Explanation   |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Population             | Patients with a terminal illness               | By only including terminally ill patients it reduces the risk of misuse of euthanasia.  |
| Exposure/ Intervention | Hospital or palliative care facility           | By narrowing it down to tertiary facilities it allows for close observation and assessment of their condition.  |
| Comparison             | New Zealand’s current and changing legislation | This topic is especially relevant now because of New Zealand’s legislative state in regard to the “End of Life Choice Bill” which is currently being debated. |
| Outcome                | Considering euthanasia                         | Exploring the impacts of terminal illness and why patients may consider euthanasia as an option at the end of life.   |
| Time                   | End of life - terminal illness                 | This time frame is related to the last weeks to months of a person’s life when they will be likely to die from their terminal illness.                        |