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A Christian Argument For Physician Assisted Death

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I have watched a lot of people die.

After college, I spent nearly two years providing patient care in the emergency department of a Level 1 trauma center. Today, I work with hospice patients, offering comfort to those who have 6 months or less to live.

I am also blessed with a big, loving, Catholic family. Our faith has played a major role in shaping each of us throughout the years.



In fact, it's safe to say religion has played a major role in every aspect of my life.

Yet I firmly believe in the right of our terminally ill to die with dignity.

Many of the recent arguments against physician assisted death have been religious ones. Though it's wonderful to see most protestors stating their positions with love and respect, I want to clearly express that **religious individuals can and do support Death with Dignity laws.**

While training to work with the terminally ill, you're taught to give patients as much control over their lives as you can. Do they want to sit in the bed or the chair today? Do they want to listen to music or watch a movie?



Photo credit: <http://ow.ly/CAcmb>

These minor choices allow ailing patients to feel as though they have a say in the last moments of their lives. Options are a small comfort – and comfort is our main goal when caring for those transitioning from life into death.

Humanity now possesses the ability to give our terminally ill a truly meaningful choice – the choice to go peacefully to God before their suffering reaches its peak.

Through the gift of scientific knowledge, we can allow our dying to choose the sort of death that is the most peaceful and comforting option for themselves and for their loved ones.

The gift of peace. The gift of comfort. Why would we ever deny the right to such blessings?

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it” (Proverbs 3:27).

Of course, the decision to end one’s life peacefully before a disease completes its course **is not for everyone – nor should it be.**

Some believe God wants us to wait until we’re taken naturally. Others want to spend every available minute with their loved ones, even if it means enduring additional suffering. **All of these beliefs and decisions are valid.**

We may know what is best for ourselves, but we cannot assume to know what God requests of others.

“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13).

I also believe strongly that scientific knowledge is a gift. God has given us intelligence, which we can use to ease suffering and improve the world around us.

“As for these...God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom” (Daniel 1:17).

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12:6).

We can take comfort in the realization that human knowledge is being used to ease suffering and provide options to those who have very few left.

I can't fault anyone who wants to cling to their last earthly moments with a loved one. I know for a fact that I do the exact same thing when faced with similar circumstances.

When the time comes for us to discuss physician assisted death with a loved one, we are free to express any concerns we have about their potential decision. Perhaps such a choice is not best for our family.

However, we must remember: **this it is not our decision to make for those whose lives we do not know.**



Photo credit: <http://ow.ly/CAeCq>

Unfortunately, our wish to hold on to our loved ones for as long as possible is often a selfish desire. Our longing is born out of love, but it might not be what's best for the person who is dying.

In fact, I have known many families who suffer less when a loved one goes quickly.

These families are comforted by the knowledge that the death was not drawn out or filled with excessive suffering.

If a dying person is mentally capable of consulting loved ones and choosing to die with dignity (and I do believe a healthy cognitive state should be required in these cases), then we must have faith that the decision was good for those involved.

It is not our right to claim to know God's plan for others.

It is not our right to take from others the ability to shorten suffering, even if we believe the path we would choose is best.

I'm grateful that we have the intelligence to debate these important issues. I'm grateful for the knowledge that everyone sharing their opinion is speaking from a place of love for those who are suffering.

Please consider this post when the time comes for your state to decide whether to allow terminally ill patients to die with dignity.

There is no cause more important than one that offers peace to those who suffer.

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