

O Kane County Chronicle PINION

Letter

A doctor's job is to always fight death

"To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug nor give advice which may cause his death." ...The Hippocratic Oath

In a recent issue of a Chicago newspaper I read an article decrying the fearsome aging of Americans. On another page a pundit was proclaiming that Dr. Jack Kevorkian was doing a service to humanity in assisting people to die. The conjoining of these two papers is coincidental, I am sure, but ironic and perhaps revealing; could there be a cause-and-effect relationship between the aging of our population and the recent rush to legalize assisted suicide?

When I was a boy, we respected our elders. Now we want to assist the old and helpless out of our lives. We are like the ancestral nomads or Eskimos who had to leave the old and infirm by the side of the trail or on the ice when the going got rough.

We have never thought kindly of suicide in this country until recently. It was a disgrace. I had a great aunt who committed suicide in 1890. I have visited her grave. My grandmother was embarrassed to mention that the aunt had simply turned on the

gas. People were ashamed and critical of suicide, and no one in my acquaintance had ever heard of assisted suicide for that would have been the same as homicide.

Why the change in attitude? Is it because we are running out of space and we think we are going to run out of money? Is that the nexus of the cause and the effect? If we had fewer people in our country would we be sanctioning assisted suicide (not to mention abortion)? Would the hew and cry about illegal and legal immigration be as loud?

You ask, well aren't you in favor of dying with dignity?

My answer is simple: no. I am not in favor of dying at all. My business as a doctor for almost 50 years has been to regard death as my enemy. Death is even more my enemy now, because I am older. I don't want anything to do with death, and I don't want my 92-year-old patient I just helped resurrect this week from death's clutches to think of me as the enemy also.

The hospital nurse asked the old lady (by yelling in her deaf ears) how much she wanted done for her (meaning how much

should we NOT do) if she had an emergency. My patient, whom I have cared for and cared about for 20 years, shouted back, "a lot!"

I don't want my patients to worry that I might be their executioner some day. Doctors should never lie to a patient and certainly should never help them out of this world. Let God do his thing; I'll do mine.

Our job is to fight death. I don't know what lies beyond and have not found anyone who does know. We were trained to heal and not to kill. Doctors should not be allowed to legally assist you to commit suicide.

How can you trust us if you think we might be in league with society or your relatives to save money instead of your life? You can ask me to help you end it all, but I will answer no. Your relatives can ask me the same, and I say no. I will say we'll do something else, whatever it takes, but never that.

And you will be relieved.

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