



Tired of Living? Why not Choose Death?



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The province of [Quebec in Canada](#) announced last week that it is now legal for terminally ill patients to choose to die. The end-of-life care bill went into effect on the 10th of December.

Quebec Health Minister Gaétan Barrette explained that the people of Quebec have now been given a choice.

The choice however, may be short-lived. The Court of Appeal is expected to hear arguments from all sides on December 18th since the Superior Court of Quebec suspended some key aspects of this new law on the grounds that it conflicted with the federal Criminal Code.

This is not a surprise. Euthanasia has been a long-debated issue in almost all parts of the globe. Despite the constant bickering between those who support it and those who don't, some may be surprised at the extent with which doctor-assisted euthanasia is spreading in Europe.

The practice is [booming in Netherlands](#) with 4,829 people choosing to have a physician end their lives in 2013 alone. Netherlands does not even require proof of terminal illness for patients to make such a request. As long as the patients are able to convince the doctors that their suffering is "unbearable", they can choose to die. Surprising isn't it, considering the fact that euthanasia in Netherlands is only legal if it strictly follows the criteria laid down in the [Dutch Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide \(Review Procedures\) Act](#). If not, those who engage in this practice can face up to four and a half years in prison.

See also: [Benelux: Focus on Euthanasia](#)

This is not to say that euthanasia is not legal anywhere. Switzerland, always one to stand out in a crowd, has been allowing doctor-assisted suicide since 1942. Their only clause is that the patient must participate in the administration of the life-ending drug. What's more, you don't even have to be a Swiss national to avail this "opportunity". Many suicide tourists engage in one-way tickets to Switzerland to achieve the end they so desire.

Lawmakers in France are considering legalising euthanasia and UK legislators are also considering introducing an assisted dying bill. Right to Die-Netherlands is an organisation that advocates the expansion of such laws. Fione Zonneveld, the communications director for this organisation predicts that Euthanasia laws should be a common practice in many Western European countries within the next ten to fifteen years.

Euthanasia is no doubt a controversial topic but one may find it interesting that [passive euthanasia](#), which refers to the withholding or withdrawal of life support, is a common practise in most developed nations. It is in fact, considered to be a form of appropriate care and no physicians are ever held accountable or criminally charged for withholding or withdrawing life support, either at the request of the patient or in compliance with their will or at the patient's family's request.

It is actually "indirect euthanasia" that evokes strong emotions all around. The act refers to the administration of large doses of analgesia with the intention of relieving not just pain but also depressing the patient's respiratory system so that death comes more quickly. Again, this is a form of care that is considered normal in certain situations. In fact, the basis of palliative care is to ensure the patient is comfortable. The goal is not to prolong their life, therefore there is little hesitation in administering a dose that may hasten death.

The moral, ethical and religious aspects of doctor-assisted euthanasia will always be there. There will be those who will bring forth arguments that nobody deserves to die after terrible suffering while there will be others who will claim that hastening death is unethical and a criminal offence. However, trends around the world suggest a definite inclination towards legalising this practice and giving patients the right to choose the way they die.

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