

Letters

Comments

– to: Waldhäusl W (2001) Editorial: Finally we have arrived in a new millennium. Diabetologia 44: 1–2

To the Editor: The *Diabetologia* issue of January 2001 opened with an editorial by the Editor-in-Chief entitled “Finally we have arrived in a new millennium”.

This editorial refers negatively to the law, recently approved by the Dutch Parliament, allowing the practice of euthanasia in The Netherlands.

The board of The ‘Nederlandse Vereniging voor Diabetes Onderzoek’ (Netherlands Association for Diabetes Research) feels obliged to make the following remarks on this editorial.

We are dealing here with a law that has been approved after long and thorough public debate by a large majority in the parliament of The Netherlands, a country with long-standing democratic traditions.

Diabetologia is the official Journal of the EASD in which The Netherlands is a participating country. The primary objective of *Diabetologia* is to publish high-quality articles related to diabetes research.

We feel that *Diabetologia* should not be used to ventilate statements on topics that are unrelated to diabetes and that reflect merely personal concerns of the Editor-in-Chief.

On behalf of the board of the ‘Nederlandse Vereniging voor Diabetes Onderzoek’,

B.H.R. Wolffenbittel, president

L.D. Elving, treasurer

J.A. Maassen, secretary

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To the Editor: With reference to your editorial in the first issue of “*Diabetologia*” in 2001, I would like to thank you for taking a clear position on the modern way of killing patients with the help of physicians in the name of humanity.

Germany has its own and tragic experience with euthanasia and it is only recently that German medical associations have dared examine the role that a number of physicians played under the “Third Reich” in atrocities which included killing disabled people.

I do hope that physicians worldwide will take into account these appalling historical facts when discussing the issue of euthanasia today.

Sincerely,

Werner A. Scherbaum, MD

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The Editor-in-Chief's reply

Dear Sirs: First of all, let me say how much I welcome the letters from The Netherlands Association for Diabetes Research and Professor Scherbaum. I hope they will stimulate the long-standing debate on euthanasia, one of several issues I touched upon in my editorial of January 2001.

In November 2000, the Dutch parliament passed legislation allowing those who suffer ‘unbearably’ and ‘hopelessly’ to request euthanasia [1]. The decision of the Dutch parliament, with its long and widely admired tradition of democracy, is of course to be respected. Also to be respected is, I believe, the right of an individual to express a viewpoint on euthanasia which is such an important and complex issue that it precludes hasty political conclusions.

My concern is with a general principle that could affect all patients with life-threatening diseases, including patients suffering from diabetes. It could also affect doctors working in the field of diabetes who would be expected to render the ‘service’ of euthanasia.

Euthanasia might also violate the right to life as enshrined in article 2 of the “Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”, passed by the Council of Europe and ratified by The Netherlands [2].

For these reasons, I think that *Diabetologia* [Clinical and Experimental Diabetes and Metabolism] should be open to the coming debate on the relative merits of palliative care and so-called legal killing for terminally ill patients [3].

Yours sincerely,

W. Waldhäusl
Editor-in-Chief

References

- [1] Griffiths J, Bood A, Weyers H: Euthanasia and law in The Netherlands. Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1998 p. 17
- [2] Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Council of Europe. European Treaty Service No. 5
- [3] Horton R (2001) Euthanasia and assisted suicide: What does the Dutch vote mean? *Lancet* 357: 1221–1222