

Case 13: Slow Medicine Elderly Care

Technological advances make it possible to prolong the life and of individuals who suffer terminal illness and/or are of advanced age. In some instances, these technologies have allowed individuals the opportunity to overcome severe obstacles and continue living a meaningful and enjoyable life. Some patients who reach an advanced age or who are suffering from a terminal disease, however, may not wish to prolong their suffering with unwanted surgeries and treatments.

In a an article published by The New York Times on May 5, 2008, Jane Gross wrote, “Grounded in research at the Dartmouth Medical School, slow medicine encourages physicians to put on the brakes when considering care that may have high risks and limited rewards for the elderly, and it educates patients and families how to push back against emergency room trips and hospitalizations designed for those with treatable illnesses, not the inevitable erosion of advanced age.”¹ Slow medicine can keep the elderly and terminally ill out of emergency rooms and hospital beds and offers the advantage of saving costs of unwanted treatments.

Slow medicine practitioners generally will delay treating illnesses, which helps give their patients more time to understand the procedures.² Such time can help prevent a rush into unwanted treatments, but opponents to slow medicine argue that this laid back approach can endanger the health of patients – that it is the physician’s role to treat illnesses promptly to ensure optimal results. Under such a model, slow medicine might be equated to a lesser form of euthanasia.³ Beyond the physical issues associated with slow medicine, opponents argue that it creates a defeated mindset in patients, encouraging them not to fight even when they may want to.⁴

¹ Gross, Jane, “For the Elderly, Being Heard About Life’s End,” *The New York Times*, May 5, 2008. Sec. Health. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/05/health/05slow.html?th=%26emc=th%26pagewanted=print>.

² “Let’s Try Slow Medicine: An Interview with Dennis McCullough, M.D.,” *The Willowgreen Newsletter*, March 26, 2008. <http://insightnewsletter.wordpress.com/2008/03/26/lets-try-slow-medicine-an-interview-with-dennis-mccullough-md/>.

³ Connor, Ken, “Encouraging Death,” *Townhall.com*, May 26, 2008. http://www.townhall.com/columnists/KenConnor/2008/05/26/encouraging_death.

⁴ Haslanger, Phil, “Faith & Values: The Pace of Death,” *The Capital Times*, May 6, 2008. Sec. Faith Blog. <http://www.madison.com/tct/blogs/faith/285003>.