**Euthanasia: the need to consider its impact on family and friends**

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**Abstract:** Given that the number of euthanasia procedures has increased in the lately years, we discuss the importance to focus on not only in the person who is undergoing euthanasia but as also the family and friends who are sharing this experience with him/her in order to make the procedure less suffered.

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Euthanasia is commonly defined as the practice of painlessly ending life to relieve incurable pain or suffering. This highly controversial subject has been discussed since ancient times (1). The morals and ethic concepts behind euthanasia continue to be an important and relevant matter of debate, especially given the increase in the number of countries in which it is legally permitted. In Belgium, which has the most liberal euthanasia laws in the world, there has been a gradual increase in the number of cases since it was legalized in 2002, with more than 5,800 reports in 2016 according to European Institute of Bioethics website (2). In the Netherlands, the percentage of deaths resulting from euthanasia rose from 1.7% in 2005 to 2.8% in 2010. (4). This shows the importance of studying a procedure that has greatly increased over recent years, particularly given its psychological impact on the family, relatives and friends of the patient.

Although the main focus of the debate has been between the rights of individuals to choose euthanasia and the sanctity of life, there is a growing consensus that more attention needs to be paid to how the procedure with all its complexities can destabilize everyone around the patients, especially relatives.

It is necessary to consider the relatives' psychological state during the period following the patient's decision to undergo euthanasia and after their death. It is important to emphasize that even in countries where euthanasia is allowed, this kind of procedure has bureaucratic protocols that demand judicial authorization, and it is only permitted in terminal diseases and extreme cases. A doctor is only allowed to proceed when he/she is familiar with the patient’s medical history and the severity of the disease. It should also be clearly demonstrated that the patient has adequately considered his decision and is sure of his choice (5). The process can, therefore, take time, meaning that relatives are exposed to the idea of the procedure over a long period. Moreover, as the majority of patients that undergo this procedure suffer from unbearable physical pain or severe psychological disorders, such as dementia, with no chance of improvement, the relatives are affected not only by the procedure itself, but also by the frequent worsening of the patient´s health.

In general, there are two situations in which individuals other than the patient have to make the decision about euthanasia: when the person is a minor or has a neurodegenerative disease. In the case of a minor, the decision to carry out euthanasia needs parental approval (6). Although the decision is not made exclusively by the parents and is discussed with the medical team and the minor (7), it is important to give them the proper attention and psychological support they require. It is certainly difficult to choose to withhold life-preserving treatment or euthanasia, especially in the case of a child. In the second situation, when the patient is diagnosed with a disease, such as dementia and there is no prospect of improvement and available treatments are futile, the procedure can only be executed with the authorization of a second and third physician and the family, as the person is not mentally competent to make a conscious and reasonable choice (8).

On those grounds, it is important to give attention not only to the patient, but also to their family and friends. More research is warranted to investigate the impact on their mental health and psychological well-being, as there are currently relatively few studies on this subject. Additional research could provide more information about how to support relatives in this situation. Understanding the impact of euthanasia on the mental health of relatives and friends can prevent the situation from worsening and enable those affected to obtain more adequate and effective support.

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