

## THE QUESTION OF EUTHANASIA

### The question of Euthanasia

Sir, — Euthanasia is a form of peaceful death when life becomes a punishment. The act of deliberately ending a patient's life, even at his request or that of his close relatives, is unethical. This does not prevent the physician from respecting the desire of a patient to allow the natural process of death to follow its course in the terminal phase of sickness. The Constitutions of countries are silent about the right to die.

However, Holland became the first country in the world to legalise Euthanasia after the Upper House of its Parliament so decided in April. Under that law, doctors involved in Euthanasia should observe certain rules.

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In India, it is said that public opinion has not been mobilised to make Euthanasia legal. There were fears in the mid-sixties regarding the legalising of abortion. The situation, however, changed in the seventies.

A mentally-competent adult patient has the right to give or withhold consent to any diagnostic procedure or therapy. He should understand the purpose of any test or treatment, and the implications of withholding consent.

Diagnostic procedures or treatment against the patient's will can be carried out only in exceptional cases. The duty of the physician is to heal, relieve suffering and act to protect the best interests of his patients.

## FOREWORD

This book entitled “Medicine: Ethics and Practice” is a collection of assorted articles written by Dr.V. Parameshwara, an outstanding Physician and Cardiologist, from time to time which have been selected on the basis of their relevance and usefulness to the public. I was rather surprised when Dr.V. Parameshwara requested me to write a foreword to this book. I told him frankly that I am not conversant with the subject matter of the articles and therefore I am not equal to the task as it is a well recognized principle that ‘one should know what one does not know’. Even after conveying my admission as above, Dr. Parameshwara insisted that I should write the foreword. He has done so out of personal regard which he has towards me and therefore I have undertaken the task of writing this foreword.

I stand assured about the fact that this book constitutes a valuable treasure in the field which it covers not only because all these writings are by Dr.V. Parameshwara, whose personality I have described as an incarnation of the maxim ‘**Vaidyo Narayano Harihi**’ in the article written by me in the felicitation volume for Dr.V. Parameshwara, but also it is being published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, who has earned the reputation of publishing books which are highly useful to the Society.

Various articles written by Dr.V. Parameshwara clearly indicate his concern for human suffering and his selfless desire to mitigate the sufferings of fellow human beings. This is the most essential quality of a medical practitioner. Though Dr.V. Parameshwara is an Allopathic, he has equal respect for alternative systems of medicine and pleads for a reasonable approach. He has explained the correct meaning of ‘Holistic Medicine’. His article ‘Diabetes/Survey and ten years follow up of diabetic persons emerged from the Survey’ indicates, the in-depth study of every health problem undertaken by him and the findings recorded by him are of immense use both to the Doctors and patients. To put it in a nut-shell, this book is really an encyclopaedia on all medical/health problems of humanity.

While studying some of our ancient texts at the Oriental Research Institute, Mysore in connection with the writing of a book on ancient

Bharatiya Legal, Judicial and Constitutional System, I had an occasion to go through 'Susruta Samhita'. One of the rules laid down therein regarding admission of a student for medical education provided that a pupil to be eligible should possess the following qualities:

- (a) The pupil should be of polite temperament
- (b) Must be of friendly nature and soft and pleasant in his dialogue with others.
- (c) Most importantly he must have genuine feeling and his heart should melt seeing the misery or pain of others
- (d) He must have an intense desire to remove the pain of others and make them happy and
- (e) He must be of good character and service minded

The rules further provided that such a pupil should be admitted to the medical course and kept on probation for six months and the teacher after examining his character and conduct during that period, if he is found to be eligible, tested on the basis of the aforesaid qualities, then only he should be admitted to the medical education. Thus, the object of medical profession was to serve humanity and not making money.

There is also a Samskrit Subhashita though in general terms which applies with greater force to medical profession. It reads:-

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“Sajjanasya hridayam navaneetam  
yadvadanti kavayastaddleekam  
anya deha vilasat paritapat  
sajjano dravati no navaneetam

“Poets say that the heart of a gentleman is as soft as butter which is not true. The reason being butter melts only when the vessel in which butter is kept is heated, whereas the heart of a gentleman melts, on seeing some one else suffering by the heat of misery.

Relying on this Subhashita, while addressing students at Karnataka Medical College, Hubli sometime back, where some of the medical students were indulging in ragging, I said such of the students who are indulging in ragging, in that, inflicting physical and mental pain and injury on fellow students, and derive enjoyment namely the ‘sadistic pleasure’ are unfit to be continued in medical course.

I say with all sincerity that Dr.V. Parameshwara is in possession of all the qualities mentioned in Susruta Samhita and he is a gentleman in the true sense of the term. He has dedicated himself to the cause of medical profession and the various articles included in this book prove this. The effort he has made, the time he has spent in research and writing articles amply prove that he is a role model for doctors. It is because of such qualities of head and heart, eminent personalities have joined together to felicitate him on his seventy seventh birthday on behalf of an ever grateful Society. Undoubtedly, the article included in this book are sure to enrich the medical science and inspire all those in medical profession to conform to professional ethics and use their knowledge to mitigate the pain and misery of fellow human beings and in particular those who belong to economically poorer sections of the Society. Dr.V. Parameshwara deserves

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