

The right to live or die

A Michigan judge sentenced Dr. Jack Kevorkian to 10 to 25 years in prison for second degree murder and three to seven years for delivery of a controlled substance.

Arguing that Kevorkian had repeatedly vowed to keep assisting terminal patients to die, Oakland County Circuit Judge Jessica Cooper also denied his request to remain free on bail pending appeal.

"I question whether you will ever cease and desist," Cooper said. Saying the case before her was not about the controversy over euthanasia, but rather about Kevorkian's willful disobedience of the law, Judge Cooper refused to deviate from the state's sentencing guidelines.

"This is a court of law," announced Cooper before delivering the sentence. There are ways of challenging laws, she said, however, "You may not take the law into your own hands."

While others were working on a proposition to legalize assisted suicide in Michigan, she said, Kevorkian was with Thomas Youk, conspiring to break the law.

"You invited yourself to the wrong forum," said Cooper, referring to his earlier remark that he forced the issue in order to make his case for euthanasia before the court.

"You had audacity to go on national television, showed the world what you did and dared the legal system to stop you," she added. "Consider yourself stopped." Cooper said the people have had a chance to speak and voted 2-to-1 against assisted suicide in a recent Michigan vote. When he injected Youk with a lethal cocktail of drugs, what he did was "murder," she said.

Prosecutors had argued that Kevorkian should get a minimum of 10 to 25 years because he is a danger to society and has shown contempt for the law. Cooper agreed.

Cooper said Kevorkian "defied" his own profession. She reminded Kevorkian that the state suspended his medical license eight years ago, and therefore, he could not legally administer any drugs to a patient, let alone administer a fatal dose.

Prosecutor John Skrzynski praised the judge, saying her sentencing was a "highly courageous thing to do."

"This is not a special case. He is not a special person. He was accountable to law," Skrzynski said. He added that Kevorkian must serve two-thirds of his term before he is eligible for parole. After three acquittals and one hung jury, Kevorkian was found guilty March 26 of second-degree murder and for his role in the televised death of 52-year-old Thomas Youk.

The defense argued that Kevorkian does not pose a threat to society and was trying to help Youk, not victimize him.

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Readily * Commit * Assisted * Concocted * Take * Aiding * Involved * Manufacture *
Concerns * Terminally * Copycat * Communal

GAP-FILL: Put the words on the right in the correct spaces

Call it _____ suicide, euthanasia, or mercy killing; whatever the name, it has just become easier to _____ suicide thanks to a new cocktail of self-mixed over-the-counter drugs. An Australian doctor and strong euthanasia campaigner, Dr. Philip Nitschke, has _____ a secret recipe to allow people to end their lives without pain. He plans to hold a workshop at a secret location in Australia to teach people how to make his "peaceful pill" from items _____ available in any pharmacy.

Nitschke, also known as Dr. Death for _____ four Australians to _____ their own lives in 1996, said his actions were not illegal. Speaking of the workshop participants, he said, "They will each teach themselves, they will each only _____ for themselves, they won't be making enough to sell to their friends or to give to their wives or husbands ... they will walk home with 10 grams of peaceful pills knowing that they've all done it themselves". The fact that no third party need be _____ means it breaks no laws.

Pro Life groups have expressed _____ about his actions. Information from his workshops will undoubtedly end up on the Internet and in the hands of any suicidal surfers. This may trigger _____ group suicides like those now occurring in Japan, where total strangers too afraid to end their lives alone, meet via the Internet and take part in _____ suicides. However, many people still feel it is their right to choose to die, especially the _____ ill who are in pain.

In your opinion, how is assisted suicide different or and similar to
abortion?

Should either one be legal?

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"I have decided for the following reasons to take my own life," it said. "This is a decision taken in a normal state of mind and is fully considered. I have Alzheimer's disease and I do not want to let it progress any further. I do not want to put my family or myself through the agony of this terrible disease."

The sons did not support her decision, Mr. Adkins, said. The two at the press conference were Neil, 32 years old, and Norman, 28. Ronald Jr., 26, did not attend.

Michigan Law Is Murky

The prosecutor for Oakland County, Mich., Richard Thompson, said no criminal charges had been filed. "We're still in the early stages of our investigation," he said. "We won't make any decision until the Michigan state police and the medical examiner have completed their investigations.

He said the state police estimated that their investigation would last at least two more weeks, and the medical examiner has said it will take several additional weeks to complete a chemical report.

Therefore, Mr. Thompson said, "it will take two months before we can decide whether to criminally prosecute anyone for the death of this woman."

He said he would ask for court order to prohibit use of the machine.

Prosecutors in the Detroit area said Michigan law was particularly murky on the subject of assisted suicide.

Dr. Kevorkian said he had not committed murder because the patient, not the doctor, administered the fatal medication.

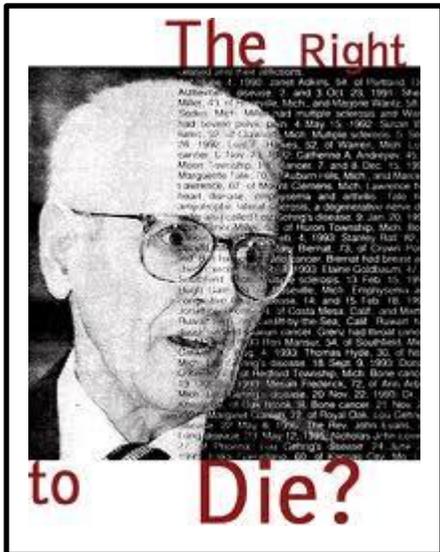
The doctor said he inserted an intravenous tube in Mrs. Adkins's arm and dripped harmless saline solution through it. Mrs. Adkins then pressed a button that stopped the saline and replaced it with thiopental, which caused unconsciousness, he said. After a minute, the machine switched solutions again, to potassium chloride, which stopped the heart and brought death within minutes.

How do you think the story ends?

Does Mr. Kevorkian continue with his death device?

Do you agree with his logic or is he just a murderer?

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The New York Times Expect the World®

Doctor Tells of First Death Using His Suicide Device

A doctor in a suburb of Detroit says he connected a woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease to a homemade suicide device Monday afternoon and watched as she pushed a button and died.

The doctor, Dr. Jack Kevorkian, said in a telephone interview yesterday that it was the first time he had used his invention, which he unveiled last fall in a series of newspaper interviews around the country. He said that Janet Adkins, who lived in Portland, Ore.,

got in touch with him as a result of the publicity and that he first met her last weekend at a restaurant near his home in Holly, Mich.

He said he explained the procedure to her at dinner and decided she was alert enough to understand.

Dr. Kevorkian, a longtime advocate of euthanasia, said he took the action partly to force the medical and legal establishment to consider his ideas. He said he knew he might face arrest.

"They'll all be after me for this," Dr. Kevorkian said in the telephone interview from Holly, about 40 miles north of Detroit. "My ultimate aim is to make euthanasia a positive experience. I'm trying to knock the medical profession into accepting its responsibilities, and those responsibilities include assisting their patients with death."

Word of Mrs. Adkins' death, which the doctor said took less than six minutes and occurred in an old Volkswagen van in a local park, alarmed many experts in medical ethics and confused many legal experts. The case raises the specific legal question of what constitutes assisted suicide and the more general philosophical question of what role, if any, doctors should play in helping their seriously ill patients die.

Suicide Note Gives Reasons

Ronald Adkins, Mrs. Adkins's husband, and two of her three sons held a press conference in Portland last night and said Mrs. Adkins made her decision to die nearly a year ago when she was first diagnosed as having Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Adkins read a suicide note his wife wrote hours before her death.