EUTHANASIA AND PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE IN SCANDINAVIA

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1 Materstvedt LJ, Kaasa S. Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in Scandinavia – with a conceptual suggestion regarding international research in relation to the phenomena. Sent to Palliat Med.
Studies

Methods

• Detailed textual reading
• Interpretation and comparison of the studies' design and their results
  – including a critical analysis of the concepts employed in the studies; the different phrasings of questions that were used; and the context descriptions against which the questions were presented to the respondents
Euthanasia (E)

What?
• A doctor’s intentionally killing a person who is suffering “unbearably” and “hopelessly” at the latter’s voluntary, explicit, repeated, well-considered and informed request

How?
• Usually (but not exclusively) by administering intravenously a lethal dose of (different) quick-acting drugs/medication
Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS)

What?
- A doctor’s intentionally helping/assisting/co-operating in the suicide of a person who is suffering “unbearably” and “hopelessly” at the latter’s voluntary, explicit, and repeated, well-considered and informed request for the doctor's participation

How?
- Usually (but not exclusively) by prescribing, preparing and giving a lethal dose of (different) drugs/medication to the person for self-administration
A summary and comparison of some crucial findings

Against E and/or PAS in a terminally ill patient (attitude):
  Norway: 65% i
  Denmark: 69% and 65% ii
  Sweden: 47% iii

In favour of E and/or PAS in a terminally ill patient (attitude):
  Norway: 17% i
  Denmark: 34% and 37% iv
  Sweden: 39% iii

Ever performed E and/or PAS in a terminally ill patient (practice):
  Norway: 6% v
  Denmark: 5% and 2% vi
  Sweden: 0% and 1% vii
Conclusions

• In spite of the cultural and political homogeneity of the Scandinavian countries, physicians report different attitudes and practices concerning E and PAS

• More precise and unambiguous definitions of E and PAS are needed in research on these phenomena