

# Is Euthanasia an Oxymoron?

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The word *euthanasia* is compound having been derived from two Greek words *eu* [good] and *thanatos* [death]; thus good death.

The question thus arises can any death be good? The answer to that question all depends on who is dying and who is there to help them in their passage “through the valley of the shadow”. In the field of medicine we physicians think in terms of three separate forms of euthanasia, two of which are immoral, unethical, and illegal, the latter having one exception explained below.

- **Active euthanasia:** This involves the deliberate and purposeful killing of one’s patient by means of a lethal injection; insulin, morphine, or air just to name a few. Used mainly in terminal illness, it is referred to as “mercy killing”. Currently in the United States of America this form of euthanasia is illegal and is considered to be an act of murder.
- **Physician Assisted Suicide:** Popularized and “perfected” by Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a former pathologist who never ever treated a live patient during his active career, this method of assisting one’s patient in their own murder [suicide] consists of physician providing the means for the final act. “Dr. Death” [AKA Kevorkian] has devised many devious and clever means for perpetrating this heinous and bitter end to his “patient’s” life. This is illegal in all states but Oregon and the law there may soon be overturned by a more

conservative administration.

The above methods of ending life are utterly deplorable and unthinkable for any of us physicians who remember well the Hippocratic Oath that we took on our day of graduation from medical school. Among other things this vow promises that, *“I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel.”*

- **Passive Euthanasia:** This process of allowing an inevitable downward spiral to proceed toward an ultimate demise is a legal, ethical, moral, and merciful way of offering aid and comfort to a terminally ill person. The goal is first and foremost comfort; comfort at all costs. The method involves analgesia [pain relief] and sedation, usually by means of a morphine drip infusion. All drugs and devices that might possibly prolong life are withheld. These include such things as insulin, cardiovascular medications, antibiotics, defibrillators, and ventilators. The method is both biblical and as old as Solomon who wrote, “Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress.” [Proverbs 31:6]

Is death good, and if it is, why do people fear it so? Paul called it “the last enemy” [1 Corinthians 15:26], but he also said “to die is gain.” [Philippians 1:21] The answer is, as stated above, “It all depends.” If the person dying is not comforted by a loving, caring, and merciful physician and is about to enter eternal perdition, death is not good. If however a Christian, attended by a compassionate team of

medical personnel, and accompanied by the Great Physician is rendered pain and anguish free and is about to enter Paradise, then “good” is insufficient to define the experience.