

**Brief from McGill University Professors Against Euthanasia and Assisted
Suicide submitted to La Commission spéciale sur la question de mourir dans la
dignité**

July 2010

This brief was authored by Professor John Zucchi and was revised with input from Professors Douglas Farrow, David Williams, Filippo Sabetti, Patrick Dias, Michael Fronda, Michael Guevara, and Daniel Cere. Over 50 professors have fully endorsed this statement. Their names, positions and email addresses are to be found at the end of the brief. We are not a formal association, and we are not speaking on behalf of our university and do not purport to represent anyone but ourselves.

Yours sincerely,

John Zucchi

McGill University Professors Against Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

submitted to

La Commission spéciale sur la question de mourir dans la dignité

July, 2010

We the undersigned, professors at McGill University, believe that the current movement in Quebec to promote euthanasia and assisted suicide is fraught with danger. For all its talk of compassion, autonomy and dignity, this movement is not upholding, but denying the true nature and value of the human person. It is also undermining long-standing medical and legal traditions based on that worth, the loss of which will have the most serious consequences.

It has always been our society's practice to accompany the suffering human being and **not** to kill him or her. We ask that this practice be reaffirmed, and that a genuinely respectful approach to human life be upheld, one that recognizes that the intrinsic worth with which every human being is endowed is not eradicated by suffering.

The alternative, which has been adopted recently in a few places, has already displayed great slippage in respect for persons. The line between voluntary and involuntary euthanasia has not proven easy to maintain; nor have the standards of discernment and verification that are supposed to protect the vacillating and the vulnerable. The present discussions grossly underestimate the potential for abuse by medical professionals and bureaucrats, as evidence from the Netherlands has shown,* and by patients' families. There are ramifications here that threaten the freedom and human rights of individuals, both patients and also medical professionals – who may be pushed into becoming society's executioners.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are not the answer to the complex problem of human suffering, whether on the physical, emotional or spiritual level. Medical advances in recent years have gone a long way in helping the suffering bear pain. What is really needed, above and beyond the medical advances and improvements in palliative care, is a willingness to be implicated in the lives of those who suffer. Companionship, a sharing of our lives, is what is required, and not merely technological solutions. It is unacceptable to turn to euthanasia and not to have considered seriously these alternatives. The reasonable answer to suffering is solidarity and not euthanasia.

We urge our fellow Quebecers to join us in opposing the inhuman nostrums of euthanasia and assisted suicide, and in reaffirming the intrinsic value of human life.

*Agnes van der Heide et. al, "End-of-Life Practices in the Netherlands under the Euthanasia Act," in *New England Journal of Medicine* 356:19 (2007), 1957-65.

Professeurs et chercheurs de l'Université McGill contre l'euthanasie et le suicide assisté

Mémoire soumis à

La Commission spéciale sur la question de mourir dans la dignité

juillet 2010

Nous, les soussignés professeurs et professeures de l'Université McGill, estimons que le mouvement actuel promouvant l'euthanasie et le suicide assisté au Québec présente un danger. Il semble soutenir la compassion, l'autonomie et la dignité du patient, mais en réalité il nie la vraie nature et la valeur de la personne humaine. De plus, cette position porte atteinte aux traditions médicales et juridiques, basées sur la valeur même de la personne humaine. Les conséquences de la perte de celle-ci pourraient être désastreuses.??

Notre société a toujours nourri la bienveillance auprès des malades, jamais l'homicide. Nous demandons que cette pratique soit réaffirmée aujourd'hui, et que soit assuré le respect de la vie humaine, i.e. la reconnaissance que la valeur de l'être humain ne peut être effacée par la souffrance.??

L'alternative, soit l'euthanasie ou le suicide assisté, récemment décriminalisés dans certains pays, est déjà responsable de la perte de respect dramatique pour la personne humaine. La frontière qui sépare l'euthanasie pratiquée avec ou sans le consentement libre et éclairé du malade a été outrepassée ; il en est de même pour les mesures encadrant et vérifiant l'application des règles qui avaient été instaurées pour protéger les indécis et les vulnérables. Les discussions actuelles sur l'euthanasie sous-estiment grossièrement le

risque d'abus de la part du personnel de la santé et des fonctionnaires, comme l'expérience hollandaise l'a démontré,* et le risque d'abus de la part de la famille du patient. Il en résulte des conséquences délétères sur la liberté et les droits humains, autant des patients que des professionnels de la santé, qui seraient contraints au rôle de bourreaux de la société.☒☒

L'euthanasie et le suicide assisté ne peuvent répondre au problème complexe de la souffrance humaine, qu'elle soit physique, émotionnelle ou spirituelle. Les progrès récents dans le domaine médical ont permis un contrôle excellent de la douleur pour le plus grand nombre. Il persiste toutefois un manque réel, et ce au-delà des avancées dans les soins palliatifs, soit le désir de s'impliquer dans les vies de ceux qui souffrent. Ce qui est nécessaire, en plus des solutions purement techniques, est une compagnie, une participation dans la vie de l'autre. Il est inacceptable de se tourner vers l'euthanasie au lieu de considérer des solutions alternatives avec plus de sérieux et d'intérêt. La réponse raisonnable à la souffrance est la solidarité, non pas l'euthanasie. ☒☒

Nous exhortons nos confrères québécois à se joindre à notre opposition face à la panacée inhumaine de l'euthanasie et du suicide assisté, et à réaffirmer la valeur intrinsèque de la vie humaine.☒

*Agnes van der Heide et. al, "End-of-Life Practices in the Netherlands under the Euthanasia Act," in *New England Journal of Medicine* 356:19 (2005), 1957-65.

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