



In this issue of *Current Oncology*

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To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of
outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a
Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them
— Shakespeare, *Hamlet* [First Folio]

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In the November 2010 issue of *Current Oncology*, an editorial by Dr. David Benatar appeared, titled “Should there be a legal right to die?” In his editorial, Dr. Benatar concluded that “it is an indecent imposition on people—an unconscionable violation of their liberty—to force them to endure a life that they have reasonably judged to be unacceptable. Accordingly, it is incumbent on liberty-respecting states to allow assisted suicide or euthanasia for those whose lives have become a burden to themselves.” Thereafter, a letter was received from a reader who insisted that a counterargument should be presented to balance the opinion expressed by Dr. Benatar.

Dr. José Pereira was then approached and mandated to write an opinion piece in which he would present his ideas on this problem. Although longer than it might have been, the submitted manuscript, “Legalizing euthanasia or assisted suicide: the illusion of safeguards and controls,” was treated as such—an opinion piece. A cursory review was done, as befits an invited manuscript that certainly would not require checking for accuracy nor for the interpretation of papers cited in support of the thesis. Because Dr. Benatar, the section editor for Biomedical Ethics, was the author of the original editorial, it was felt that he should not be involved, at the section editor level, in the processing of the Pereira opinion piece, nor in any subsequent correspondence or submissions.

This edition of *Current Oncology* contains three manuscripts on the topic of euthanasia and assisted suicide:

- The first article, by Professor Jocelyn Downie and colleagues, titled “Pereira’s attack on legalizing euthanasia or assisted suicide: smoke and mirrors” seriously questions some of the empirical claims in Dr. Pereira’s article. The authors contend that a number of statements were submitted as fact by Dr. Pereira in the article without the provision of any sources and that, in other cases, the sources provided did not support the statements made. Downie *et al.* conclude that the manuscript contents should not be granted credibility in the ongoing debate about the legal status of assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada and around the world. *Current Oncology* takes this criticism of Pereira’s article seriously. The journal publishers and editorial staff consulted with medical ethicists and legal counsel on how to proceed, so as to be fair to all concerned. Dr. Pereira was asked to respond, and a third opinion relating to euthanasia was also sought.
- The second manuscript, titled “Casting stones and casting aspersions: let’s not lose sight of the main issues in euthanasia debate” is a rebuttal by Dr. Pereira. He clearly acknowledges his errors and omissions. He attempts to explain and submits substantiated proof that, despite his previous oversights in interpretation, his conclusions remain unaltered. He reiterates that, in his opinion, too few effective safeguards are in place to effectively prevent malpractice in euthanasia and assisted suicide.
- The third manuscript, by Professor Mary Shariff, “Assisted death and the slippery slope—finding clarity amid advocacy, convergence, and complexity” effectively addresses, to my mind, the fundamental debate, thus allowing both the experienced and the inexperienced reader in the area of euthanasia to better understand the complexities and differences in the various judicial regions regarding the “slippery slope” argument. Professor Shariff eloquently identifies what lies at the top and at the bottom of the slippery slope and the differences in the various jurisdictions of

the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the states of Washington and Oregon. After identifying some of the recent concerns that have arisen within each of the jurisdictions (which might be viewed by some as evidence of slide), the paper concludes by making note of some of the critical issues that merit deeper examination in the current assisted-death debate.

Obviously, through both the Downie retort and the Pereira reply, we learned that the matter should

not—indeed could not—be left without a complete airing of this vital topic for our readership. Hence, the pertinent material is here presented for our readers to review and judge for themselves.

In conclusion, we have all learned much about the controversial topic of euthanasia. The status of the original Pereira manuscript will be changed to an “Opinion piece”. Further correspondence is to be encouraged, and *Current Oncology* now has the ideal forum: the Cancer Knowledge Network, in which opinions can be expressed and dialogue encouraged.