

## **Life and death not just up to doctors**

While I accept that there are “good moral reasons why self-determining, autonomous people, at the end of their lives and in the face of great suffering should be able to request active help in dying (Dr Helga Kuhse, ‘The Age, 18/2), I do not believe that doctors alone should be given the responsibility to make such a decision. It is no longer acceptable for health care professionals to be protected from public opinion by their white coats.

It is common practice for doctors to initiate treatment (for example, large quantities of morphine) that will inevitably hasten a death. Such practices are considered humane. Yet if a daughter poisons her terminally ill mother, despite the humane intention, she commits murder.

In our society it is assumed that health care professionals have the knowledge and the sensibilities to make such life-and-death decisions. Yet the reality is that many health care professionals may have the medical knowledge without the maturity, experience or the good sense to make a well informed decision. Doctors are not infallible and may show poor judgment. They must, therefore, be held publicly accountable for their decisions.

Physician-assisted aid in dying merely extends the enormous power our society gives to health care professionals and the potential abuse of this authority is obvious. Instead, such decisions should be made by a multi-disciplinary approach that allows a broader perspective.

While no one should be forced to end a life by jumping out a window, doctors must not be allowed to make autonomous decisions about who is, and who is not, allowed to die with dignity.

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