

Cost Analysis and Legislative Suggestions of Euthanasia From the Perspective of Economics

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Abstract: *Euthanasia has always been one of the hot topics in the medical community. Its starting point is to help patients free themselves from the physical pain and mental suffering they are bearing, so that patients can leave with dignity and dignity at the last moment of their life. However, euthanasia, in essence, is an individual's behavior of deliberately ending life, and its legalization needs to be deeply studied. In view of the current understanding of euthanasia and the current legislative process of euthanasia in China, this paper puts forward relevant legislative suggestions from the concept, economic cost and legislative norms of euthanasia.*

Keywords: *Economics; euthanasia; Life autonomy; Economic cost; Legislative recommendations*

1. Introduction

In the past, the Chinese the common always kept the word "death" in secret, and even thought it was unlucky to talk about death. Different the common have different attitudes towards death, some are afraid, some are helpless and some are indifferent.

With the rapid development of society and the general rise of national education, the folk began to pay attention to the topic of life and death, and began to explore how to live and die with dignity. Talking about life and death with dignity, we can't get around the topic of "euthanasia". Euthanasia, in essence, refers to the death of individuals with dignity, which is also known as painless death. From the perspective of modern medical concepts, generally, the application condition of euthanasia is that when the folk with incurable diseases or the folk in other specific states are in a serious near death state, due to extreme mental and physical pain, they get the consent of doctors at the request of patients or relatives and friends, Let the patient spend the last journey of life in a painless state. It can be seen that the starting point of euthanasia is to help patients free from pain and let patients die with dignity. However, from another point of view, euthanasia is an act of deliberately ending life, and its legalization still needs in-depth discussion and research.

This paper discusses the cost of euthanasia from the perspectives of economics and law, and puts forward the establishment of targeted legislation.

2. Analyze the Cost of Euthanasia from the Perspective of Economics

In 2015, Chambaere, Kenneth and other researchers investigated and analyzed the data of euthanasia in Belgium. The study found that from 2007 to 2013, the number of requests for euthanasia in Belgium was increasing, and more and more doctors began to be willing to accept the requests for euthanasia put forward by patients [1]. These data tell us that from a global perspective, the folk's acceptance of euthanasia is increasing, and they believe that it is an effective means to maintain their dignity and alleviate pain at the last moment of life.

Table 1 Survey data of euthanasia in Belgium

Variable	Survey Year				P Value†
	1998	2001	2007	2013	
Total deaths annually — no.	56,354	55,793	54,881	61,621‡	—
Deaths in survey sample — no.	3999	5005	6202	6188	—
Response rate — % of physicians surveyed	48.1	58.9	58.4	60.6	—
Studied cases — no.	1925	2950	3623	3751	—
Death preceded by at least one end-of-life practice — % (95% CI)	39.3 (37.0–41.6)	38.4 (36.5–40.3)	47.8 (45.9–49.8)	47.8 (46.1–49.5)	>0.99
Intensified alleviation of pain and other symptoms§	18.4 (16.6–20.4)	22.0 (20.5–23.6)	26.7 (25.1–28.4)	24.2 (22.9–25.7)	0.02
Withholding or withdrawing of life-prolonging treatment	16.4 (14.7–18.3)	14.6 (13.2–16.0)	17.4 (15.9–19.0)	17.2 (15.9–18.6)	0.85
Physician-assisted death¶	4.4 (3.5–5.5)	1.8 (1.4–2.4)	3.8 (3.2–4.5)	6.3 (5.6–7.1)	<0.001
Euthanasia	1.1 (0.7–1.7)	0.3 (0.2–0.5)	1.9 (1.6–2.3)	4.6 (4.0–5.2)	<0.001
Assisted suicide	0.12 (0.04–0.36)	0.01 (0.00–0.10)	0.07 (0.02–0.19)	0.05 (0.02–0.13)	0.97
% of deaths with request for euthanasia or assisted suicide	2.1 (1.6–2.9)	—	3.5 (3.0–4.1)	6.0 (5.3–6.7)	<0.001
% of requests for euthanasia or assisted suicide granted	57.4 (41.0–72.4)	NC	56.3 (48.2–64.0)	76.8 (71.2–81.6)	<0.001
Hastening of death without explicit request from patient	3.2 (2.4–4.1)	1.5 (1.1–2.0)	1.8 (1.3–2.4)	1.7 (1.3–2.2)	0.84
Continuous deep sedation until death — % (95% CI)	—	8.2 (7.1–9.4)	14.5 (13.1–15.9)	12.0 (10.9–13.2)	0.002
Patient decided to stop eating and drinking — % (95% CI)	—	—	—	0.5 (0.3–0.7)	NC

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2.1 Resource Saving

Knowing that it is difficult to cure by medical means, euthanasia is a good choice for many private individuals to make the last journey of life less painful and more dignified. For the society, under the current medical conditions, due to the shortage of medical resources in China, euthanasia can avoid unnecessary waste of medical resources, so as to make more rational and efficient use of limited medical resources [1].

2.2 Pain Reducing

In medicine, human pain is divided into 10 grades, from painless grade 0 to severe pain grade 10 (as shown in Fig. 1). Among them, when the pain level reaches level 4, the pain will affect the individual's sleep; When the pain level reaches level 7, the individual will be unable to sleep due to pain.

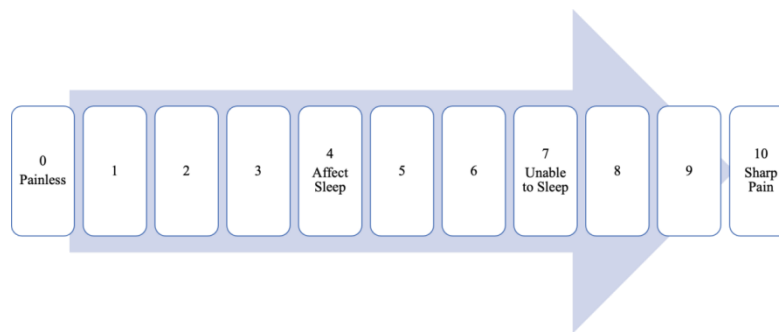


Fig. 1 Pain level

Relying on scientific and efficient modern medical knowledge and contemporary medical level, human life expectancy has been extended to a certain extent. For healthy individuals, longevity is naturally a good thing; For dying patients who are experiencing extreme pain, longevity may not be a good thing. When the degree of pain allows patients to overcome their fear of death, it can be imagined that the degree of pain must be unbearable [3].

Perhaps, the current medical level can temporarily maintain the life length of dying patients who are suffering from extreme pain, but patients need to endure not only the severe physical pain, but also the great mental pain of dying. These two kinds of pain are intertwined. The double pain will inevitably make the patient feel that life is better than death, and euthanasia can make the patient feel relieved and no longer suffer from the double pain.

2.3 Dignity Maintaining

For dying patients suffering from extreme physical pain, they barely maintain their lives through life support means such as cardiac pacemakers. This way of survival not only needs to face the increasing pain and fear of death at any time, but also undermines their personal dignity. For individuals, life is dignified only when the value of life is not underestimated [4].

For dying patients suffering from extreme pain, their objective value almost does not exist except the deep concern of their relatives and friends. At this time, respect and agree that these patients choose to face death in a dignified way, which is not only the reasonable exercise of their right to life, but also a crucial embodiment of the progress of human society.

3. Legislative Suggestions on Euthanasia from the Perspective of Economics

While formulating laws and regulations related to euthanasia, according to China's national conditions and the current situation of euthanasia, this paper puts forward legislative suggestions from four aspects: the applicable object, application process, review and approval and specific implementation of euthanasia.

3.1 Applicable Objects

The object of euthanasia should be patients suffering from terminal illness, dying and unbearable continuous physical pain. Fig. 2 illustrates the conditions of euthanasia in detail.

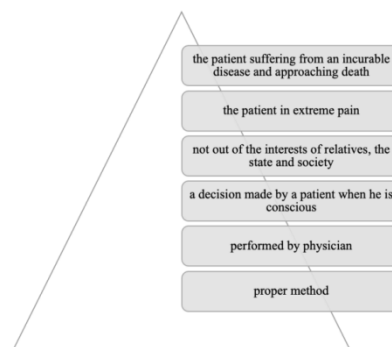


Fig. 2 Conditions of euthanasia

This paper holds that the applicable objects of euthanasia should also include infants with severe disability and dementia at birth, patients with severe mental illness, severely disabled people, and "vegetative people" in irreversible coma. From the perspective of economics, if euthanasia is not allowed for such objects, it will bring a heavy burden to their families and even society.

3.2 Application Process

From the perspective of application process, this paper believes that the euthanasia application submitted by the patient must be safe and voluntary, which means that the euthanasia application must be submitted by me personally and without any coercion. In order to ensure that the euthanasia application submitted by the patient is completely from the heart, the attending doctor must state the actual condition of the patient without obscurity, analyze and predict the treatment results of the patient [5].

If the patient is convinced that the current medical means have been unable to cure himself and voluntarily submit an application for euthanasia, the hospital also needs to arrange a psychologist to diagnose the patient's current mental outlook and confirm that the patient voluntarily applies for euthanasia under the condition of clear mind. Therefore, the patient's euthanasia application should be signed by the attending doctor and psychologist before it can take effect.

3.3 Review and Approval

Due to the particularity of euthanasia application, it needs to ensure not only the strictness of the application process, but also the strictness of the review process. Specifically, in the process of examining

the euthanasia application, the examiner not only needs to fully and comprehensively understand the applicant's condition and pain, but also needs to confirm the authenticity of the applicant's euthanasia intention. In fact, from a clinical point of view, there is no clear and operable reference standard for the concept of "near death state". Therefore, the judgment of whether the patient is on the verge of death is mainly based on the doctor's previous experience. However, since it is artificial judgment, there is bound to be the possibility of miscarriage of justice. In practice, due to the differences in mental state and physiology of patients, as well as the backward medical facilities, low medical level and insufficient experience of medical personnel in some areas, misjudgment is likely to occur [6]. Therefore, this paper believes that the identification link of whether the patient is in a near death state must be implemented by hospitals above the county level. Moreover, the judgment of whether the patient is in a near death state must also be unanimously recognized after consultation by three or more doctors with intermediate technical titles.

As for the judgment of patients' physical pain, it should be judged from the average pain tolerance of the public. If the patient's physical pain is unbearable to the general public, the patient is in extreme pain.

In addition, the reviewer must also comprehensively and systematically consider the real wishes of the parties. Even if the authenticity of the parties' wishes has been judged, a cooling off period needs to be set to allow the parties to calm down for a period of time before confirming the application. However, it is worth noting that the length of the cooling off period must be scientific and reasonable. On the one hand, the cooling off period should be long enough to ensure that the applicant has sufficient time to think about whether to determine euthanasia; On the other hand, the cooling off period should not be too long, otherwise the patient is likely to suffer physical and mental pain.

In a word, only through strict examination and approval can we ensure the true will of patients, minimize the probability of misjudgment, and be regarded as respect for life.

3.4 Specific Implementation

The implementation of euthanasia is the last and most critical step in the process of euthanasia, which directly determines whether the applicant can die with dignity and painless. According to the time and place of the euthanasia execution notice, the euthanasia committee will assign special personnel to the euthanasia implementation site to supervise the execution of euthanasia. Before euthanasia, the applicant must issue the euthanasia execution notice again, and the reviewer must also verify the applicant's personal information and the relevant qualification certificate of the executing doctor again [7].

Even during the execution of euthanasia, the executors must fully respect the applicant's right to regret, that is, as long as the applicant proposes to suspend the execution of euthanasia, the executors must stop the execution. Moreover, if the applicant again proposes to carry out euthanasia after stopping the euthanasia ring Festival, the applicant must resubmit the application according to the specified procedures.

Fig. 3 illustrates in detail the five processes of euthanasia.

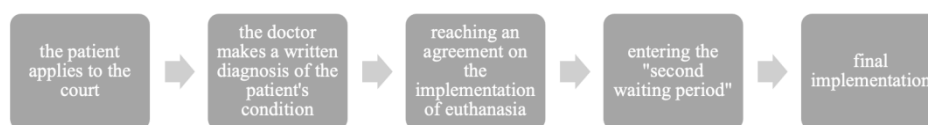


Fig. 3 Specific process of euthanasia

4. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper discusses the economic cost of euthanasia and relevant legal suggestions from the perspective of economics and law. From the perspective of economics, euthanasia can save social resources, free patients from physical and mental pain, and safeguard patients' personal dignity. However, euthanasia also inevitably requires patients to have the great courage to face death, and to obtain the understanding and support of their families and relatives. Moreover, patients are also exceedingly likely to lose the cure opportunity brought by the progress of medical level during the continuous treatment. From the perspective of law, for each individual, euthanasia should be one of the contents of his life autonomy and a right that everyone can exercise. Weighing the pros and cons, this paper holds that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of the legalization of euthanasia. In view of the rapid

improvement of China's education and medical level, as well as the practical needs of the society for euthanasia, this paper believes that China should speed up the legislative process of euthanasia and make clear and specific provisions strictly from the applicable objects, application process, examination, approval and implementation.

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