



MedStar Washington
Hospital Center

Knowledge and Compassion
Focused on You

International Panel: Differing Ethical Perspectives on Assisted Suicide

Outline of Panel Presentation

- **Laura Guidry-Grimes, PhD(c)**

Clinical Ethicist | Center for Ethics, MedStar Washington Hospital Center, USA

- **Katherine Brown-Saltzman, MA, RN**

Co-Director | Ethics Center, UCLA Health System, USA

- **Anne-Marie Slowther, DPhil**

Associate Professor | Warwick Medical School, UK

- **Stella Reiter-Theil, PhD**

Professor and Director | Dept of Clinical Ethics, University Hospitals Basel, Switzerland

- **Question & Answer**



Disclaimer (Laura Guidry-Grimes)

The views presented here are my own and do not reflect those of MedStar Washington Hospital Center or the Center for Ethics.

No conflicts of interest to report.



Faulty Way to Advocate for AS

- Purely in terms of *expanding patient choice*
- Increased choice as an alleged ethical aim because **choice is....**
 - intrinsically valuable?
 - necessary to improve autonomy interests?
 - necessary for patients to make decisions that are more likely to serve their individual welfare?



Choice as Intrinsically Valuable?

- If choice is **intrinsically** valuable, then
 - it is valuable *in itself*
 - “if choice has value in virtue of being choice, then more of it must have more value” (G. Dworkin, *Theory and Practice of Autonomy*)

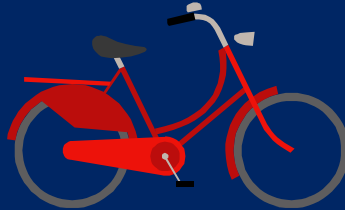


What Is the Value of Choice?

Option A



Option B



Option C



Better to be given
choice between B
and C than to be
given A? **Always?**



What Is the Value of Choice?

- Satisfies desires, preferences, other values
- Assists us in developing character traits and epistemic virtues
- Helps us learn about ourselves
- Leads to a more functional society, assists long-term cooperation

→ Choice as
*instrumentally
valuable*



Choice as Necessary to Improve Autonomy Interests?

- First, must delineate
 - autonomy
 - liberty
 - control
 - independence
 - invulnerability



When Choice Does Not Aid Autonomy

- Human agents as fallible, finite creatures with limited cognitive capacities, limited time, and vulnerabilities to many forms of manipulation
- **IF it will serve autonomy, more choice means**
 - need to acquire more information
 - need for more time
 - increased psychological effort in weighing, reflecting
 - increased strain to prevent undue influence
 - → threat of **decisional fatigue**



Choice as Necessary for Pts to Make Decisions More Likely to Serve Their Individual Welfare?

Threats to autonomy →

deciding *without* full reflection, *without* sufficient information, *with* more pressures →

might not be capable of advocating for one's welfare interests in many instances



Further Impediments to Pts' Advocating for Their Welfare Interests

- **Vulnerabilities at end of life**
 - Not wanting to be a “burden”
 - Fears about losing control or sense of dignity
 - Pain, which may be intractable
 - Financial strain
 - Unable to imagine oneself as severely impaired
- **Grappling with vulnerabilities in an imperfect healthcare system w/ far-from-ideal EOL care**



Choice & Interests at the End of Life

- Questions to ask:
 - Does having AS as an option **compound patients' vulnerabilities** at EOL (in this clinical setting, with this health condition, in this state, with this insurance...)?
 - Does having AS as an option result in **complicity and/or complacency with far-from-ideal EOL care** in this country?
 - If yes to either, can these effects be **mitigated** or **overridden** by other ethical considerations?



Ending Points

- Choice is not intrinsically valuable, so **expanding choice will be valuable only insofar as the choices provided predictably serve other attainable values that are worthwhile.**
- Choice is not the only relevant value with end-of-life care.
- In order to determine if AS could be ethically justifiable policy or practice, we have to consider the backdrop against which AS is proposed.



Laura.K.Guidry-Grimes@medstar.net

Thank You!



MedStar Washington
Hospital Center

Knowledge and Compassion **Focused on You**