

The ethical issue I am analysing is euthanasia in New Zealand. This is an ethical issue because it is controversial – it is about life and death decisions. There are many different views towards the issue in society, with people feeling very strongly about whether it is right or wrong. Euthanasia means ‘a good death’ (1) and it is concerned with a person’s right to choose to end their own life (and get help to do so) if they choose.

1

Two main groups ‘for’ euthanasia in NZ are (some) people suffering from a terminal illness and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (VES). People suffering from a terminal illness believe that they should have the right to ‘die with dignity’ and be free from suffering, and that it is their choice as to when and how they die (3). They value the ability to have control over their end of life decisions and that they do not want to suffer a slow and painful end. For example, the recent case of Lecretia Seales in NZ. Some of her key beliefs were that she should be able to have her doctor help her die when her quality of life was gone and that others in similar situations should also have the option to choose how they live and die (lecretia.org). This point of view links to the ethical principle of the rights approach. The second group who support euthanasia in NZ are VES – the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NZ. They believe in ‘dignity in death’ which means people have the right to not suffer and to be in control of their body, while they are still in a clear state of mind (4). They believe that this is what the majority of people want (7/10 NZers – 4) and therefore it is wrong for euthanasia to be illegal. This links to the underlying attitudes and values of care and concern and respect for the rights of others – to make sure people who are dying don’t suffer, and those who might help them are not prosecuted.

2

Two main groups ‘against’ euthanasia are The Catholic Church – Nathaniel Centre and Hospice NZ [...]

As stated before, euthanasia is illegal in NZ. I will explain implications of this situation at personal, interpersonal and societal levels.

At a personal level, the fact that euthanasia is illegal means that most people who are terminally ill will not choose to end their own life or seek help from others to speed up their death. As a result, they may be in physical pain and suffer from a long decline in health, which will be distressing for themselves and others. An extract from Lecretia Seales’ legal argument is: (if she cannot access euthanasia she will have a) cruel choice between taking her own life through potentially violent, painful and ineffective means, or suffering intolerably from a potentially slow, painful and undignified death" (10). Those who seek and gain support from someone else to die risk their doctor, friend or family member being prosecuted, as this is illegal. This could lead to long-term impacts for the support person who helps them die (for example, the Lesley Martin case in NZ) such as being charged and being found guilty and going to prison. Those disadvantaged by the situation in NZ are those who are suffering, as they are unable to choose how/when to end their suffering. This may also disadvantage the taxpayer and health system, as they may need more time in expensive care.

3

Interpersonally [...]

Societally [...]

Note that a chart was provided by the student to show bibliographic details for the references used in the evaluation.