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OPINION

A momentum shift against assisted suicide

by J.J. Hanson | Sep 3, 2017, 12:01 AM

Momentum is finally shifting against the legalization and expansion of assisted suicide. Twenty-three states have rejected bills attempting to legalize assisted suicide since the beginning of 2017, and these bills are now considered dead for the remainder of the year. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

Momentum is finally shifting against the legalization and expansion of assisted suicide. Twenty-three states have rejected bills attempting to legalize assisted suicide since the beginning of 2017, and these bills are now considered dead for the remainder of the year.

Why such unusual bipartisan consensus? In our profit-driven healthcare system, where care is expensive and assisted suicide is cheap, patients with terminal illnesses, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor are in grave danger of being pushed towards a death-too-soon. Assisted suicide policy injects

government bodies and insurance companies with financial incentives into every single person's end of life decisions.



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The states that defeated these bills to legalize or expand assisted suicide run the gamut politically, from New York and Rhode Island to Utah and Indiana. Such bills were defeated by votes in the legislature, died from inaction, stalled in committee or were completely withdrawn. A circuit court in Hawaii dismissed a lawsuit which asked the court to resolve that the criminal laws in the state should not apply to assisted suicide.

And there are four additional states — Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan — that are unlikely to act on similar measures this fall. Another indication that momentum is shifting in opposition to the expansion of this practice is states like Alabama and Ohio recently enacted laws to strengthen prohibition of assisted suicide. And a congressional committee passed an amendment to their appropriations bill to repeal the new DC law legalizing assisted suicide.

The success in beating back legalization or expansion of assisted suicide has been mainly due to the committed opposition of legislators from both political parties, and broad coalitions of organizations – both progressive and conservative – in each state, that are working tirelessly to educate legislative bodies and the public on the issue. These coalitions include all major disability rights organizations, medical community members and associations, faith-based organizations, life and family advocacy groups, patient advocates, elder abuse lawyers, and more.

Just in the last year, there have been more cases of patients being denied coverage for care which shows that legalizing assisted suicide results in more abuse and less choice. **Stephanie Packer**, a California mother of four suffering from a serious form of scleroderma, reported that her insurance company denied her coverage for chemotherapy treatment but offered to pay for a lethal prescription.

And **Dr. Brian Callister**, a Nevada physician, asked two different insurance medical directors to approve life-saving treatments but his patients were denied and offered coverage for suicide drugs instead. Those patients were from states that have legalized assisted suicide. In addition to entangling the government and profit-driven companies in everyone's end of life decisions, loopholes abound in this bad policy that allow for abuse.

For example, we know that **in Oregon** only 4 percent of patients considering assisted suicide are being referred for psychological evaluation, yet 26 percent overall were found to have major depressive disorder. These numbers suggest that persons with mental illness could be prescribed a death-too-soon instead of the treatment they ought to receive. Some vulnerable

populations, like people with disabilities and terminal illness, are at a higher risk should assisted suicide become legal in more places.

But the truth is that it affects everyone. It's a human issue, and that's why the winds are changing on this dangerous practice.

J.J. Hanson is a terminal brain cancer patient and president of the Patients Rights Action Fund.

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