

## **ATTITUDES TOWARD PASSIVE EUTHANASIA AMONG POLISH PHYSICIANS AND FAMILY CAREGIVERS VS. PEOPLE HAVING NO EXPERIENCE WITH INCURABLE SICK PEOPLE**

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The problem of Euthanasia is a controversial issue that attracts a broad social debate. Euthanasia is generally classified as either active or passive. The former is usually defined as taking specific steps to cause the patient's death, the latter one is described as withdrawing medical treatment with the deliberate intention of causing the patient's death. Among those taking part in the debate there are scientists, politicians and lawyers, who try to settle a dispute between supporters and opponents of euthanasia. This involves approaching the problem from multitude of dimensions, such as the religious, legal, cultural, ethical, medical, and spiritual. The problem becomes more important as the progress of medical science makes it possible to keep terminally ill patients and people in persistent vegetative state alive for many years. Mass media present numerous instances of such a dramatic cases. This includes for e.g.: Eluana Englaro, Terry Schiavo, and Diane Pretty. The UK example of Diane Pretty involved a woman suffering from a terminal disease, who made an attempt to influence a change of legislation concerning euthanasia in her homeland. Her appeals to the public, in which she proclaimed: *"I want to have a quick death without suffering, at home surrounded by my family"* have not influenced the lawmakers. British Courts refused to recognize the right to die. Many people share this sentence. Believing that life is the supreme value and no one should be allowed to assist others in committing suicide. Those who oppose this view on the other hand, emphasize that the value of life can not be isolated from the issue of living quality. The satisfactory solution of the matter in dispute has not been found yet. However, this problem should be examined and solved very quickly, because it seems to be a source of pain to either the patients or to their relatives and friends. The purpose of the present study was to reveal the attitude toward passive euthanasia among selected groups: Polish physicians working at Intensive Care Unit; family caregivers taking care for terminally ill and handicapped relatives over a long period of time; individuals who have no experience with palliative treatment and 24/7 care for their close ones. It was expected that close contact with incurable ill people can modify the attitude toward the passive euthanasia. According to previous research it had been predicted that physicians would consider the passive euthanasia as acceptable. In particular more than half of the Swedish oncologists declared they had heard their patients expressing a wish to pass away on their own. About one-third of them had provided the drugs or medicines in such doses that some of their patients' deaths were hastened. The questionnaire measuring the beliefs about many aspects of the passive euthanasia was constructed especially for the survey. Results indicated specific effects, which have been analyzed from different perspectives and use for further research.