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## Letter to the Editor

### Response to: “Euthanasia in Dementia: The Gap Between Ethics and Law”

We thank Kim et al.<sup>1</sup> for sharing their perspective on our study on acceptability of euthanasia in dementia.<sup>2</sup> Increasing numbers of jurisdictions have approved medical aid in dying in recent years, and several allow it for people with dementia.<sup>3</sup> Our study highlights that opinions on acceptability of euthanasia (with a medical professional actively ending life upon a patient's request) vary among clinicians within high-income countries in western Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia with or without such legislation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the presence of legislation does not imply that the issue has been settled. Kim et al.<sup>1</sup> clearly indicate that rather it defines the boundaries of practice where no consensus could be achieved and ethical, professional or personal ambivalence persists.

The authors of the letter also highlight that the factors we identified as related to acceptability of euthanasia or willingness to perform euthanasia (no religion, no palliative care training, fewer specific coping styles) are unlikely changed by legislation alone. We agree, and while religiousness

and religious coping may change in secularizing countries, individual coping styles would remain diverse. Emotional social support and—perhaps counterintuitively—planning coping styles were less common in those willing to conduct euthanasia and those who found it acceptable, respectively. Fewer specific coping styles and no palliative care training operated independently of the clinicians adhering to any religion, meaning they are not explained or “overshadowed” by differences in religion.

Palliative care training may affect beliefs about what constitutes unbearable suffering and teach how to mitigate suffering related to physical symptoms such as pain, but also to spiritual or existential distress. Palliative care and dementia care training must attend to the fact that persons do request euthanasia or other forms of medical assistance in dying. Training should not only address legal or procedural aspects. It should address clinicians' emotions and possible existential, spiritual and ethical questions on life worth living they may have regarding euthanasia in persons who are losing capacity to decide or to confirm a request. Further, care partners, often family, may feel responsible to enact or advocate for a euthanasia request in an advance directive.<sup>4</sup> They may also suffer from

moral distress or guilt related to a patient's request for any medical assistance in dying. Training should make clinicians aware of the care partner's position and possible unease with acknowledging a role for which little guidance is available as yet.

We appreciate the conclusion of Kim et al.<sup>1</sup> that legislation does not suffice, and prudent implementation with ongoing dialogue, safeguards for the persons, pathways for objection and referral for clinicians, and education are needed. However, rather than a “gap between ethics and law” which suggests law to support unethical practice, we concur with Kim et al. that policy makers should acknowledge that the topic of euthanasia in dementia is situated “at the intersection of law, culture, and individual morality.” This issue is likely to be the subject of debate for a considerable period of time.

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