

Joint statement of FIAMC and FEAMC on “Assistance to patients at end of life”

20 April 2005

The catholic doctors of the European Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FEAMC), and of the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC) learning that a draft resolution entitled “Assistance to patients at end of life”, which has already been approved by the “Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee” of the Council of Europe, and is to be tabled soon for voting by the Parliamentary Assembly;

- are surprised at this particularly ambiguous text which is far less focused on “assistance to patients at end of life” than the Recommendation 1418 of 1999, and whose final goal seems to be to give birth to legislation regulating euthanasia in the member states.

Some elements of this resolution recall recommendation 1418 on “protecting the human rights and dignity of the terminally ill and the dying” by:

- re quoting the recommendation; (1)
- reasserting that “it is forbidden to cause someone’s death deliberately”; (1)
- urging “promotion of palliative treatment” (4a , 6c)
- reasserting the rights of the patient “to be properly informed... of his or her condition” (5a), and “to decline the treatment proposed” (5b) Others clauses concern the prevention of suicide such as:
 - duty to “implement a genuine policy of assistance to patients at end of life which does not cause them to want to die” (4)
 - “promotion or reinforcement of a genuine suicide prevention policy” (4e, 6d)
 - “particular attention to ensuring that the current social changes in many countries in Europe, such as the ageing of the population and increasing health costs, do not give rise to social or family pressure to seek assistance with suicide, undermining society’s feeling of responsibility towards elderly and dependent persons” (6h)

However, the above recommendations seem to be a “smokescreen” intended to mask the promotion of legislation favouring euthanasia in member states. Otherwise why

- quote the Dutch and Belgian legislation (2a), and propose that member states “analyse them objectively and in depth” (6a)
- quote “opinion polls” favourable to euthanasia (2c) and mention “serious scientific studies”, without any reference as to the source, revealing the practice of illegal euthanasia (2d)
- recommend to “reduce as far as possible the practice of euthanasia in secret or in a legal vacuum”, or because of “outdated norms” (?) (5, 6e)

Lastly, some recommendations should be very interpreted cautiously, namely:

- “development of codes of medical ethics to avoid superfluous treatments ...” (4d)
- “accurately define the responsibilities and procedures for discontinuing treatment where it will only secure a slight prolongation of life ...” (6f)
- “promote public discussion so as to create the greatest possible transparency and accountability in an area too often subject to decisions taken by the medical profession ...” (6g)
- approve the amendments voted by the “Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights”, notably those concerning paragraphs 4, 4a, 5b, and 6.
- implore the Parliamentary Assembly to delete the elements which tend to promote euthanasia: namely the whole of paragraph 2, first two sentences of paragraph 5 and sub-paragraphs 6a, 6e, and 6g.
- maintain their commitment to the Recommendation 1418 of the Council of Europe on the “Protection of the human rights and dignity of the terminally ill and the dying”.

In the name of the Committees of FEAMC and FIAMC

Prof. Josef Marek, MD, Ph.D, President of FEAMC

Dr Gian Luigi Gigli, MD, President of FIAMC