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SHOULD DOCTORS BE ALLOWED TO ASSIST SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENTS WITH SUICIDE?

Word Generation - Unit 2.13

Focus Words

prevention | critical | pursue | alter | approach



Weekly Passage

When Ryan Ben's uncle was in the hospital in severe pain the doctor said he had only about a month to live. Ryan's uncle asked the doctor to give him pills so he could end his life. The doctor, however, refused to provide pills to assist with suicide. She said her approach was to help save lives, not end them.

But people like Ryan's uncle say they don't want a long painful death. They also worry about how much money useless treatment will cost their families. Since 1990, the idea of assisted suicide has been supported by Dr. Jack Kervorkian. According to Dr. Kervorkian, people have the right to pursue happiness. For people who are dying, he says, that includes the right to die when they choose.

Others are critical of that view. They say patients are not capable of making that choice. For one thing, patients who are in pain can't think clearly. They may just want to end the pain, not their lives. The right treatment could be all that is needed for prevention of the pain. Those who are against assisted suicide also worry that family members might urge a sick relative to die in order

to reduce medical bills. Besides, some say, suicide is wrong. Human beings didn't create life, so they don't have the right to take it, even their own.

People who support assisted suicide say it is cruel to make suffering people live. They say healthy people have no idea how bad pain can be. They want to alter the laws to make assisted suicide legal. A law legalizing assisted suicide passed in Oregon in 1997 and in Washington in 2008. In all other states a doctor who assists a suicide is considered to be guilty of murder. Where do you stand? Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What is assisted suicide?
- ▶ Why are some people critical of helping ill patients with assisted suicide?
- ▶ Why are some people in favor of the assisted suicide option?
- ▶ Do you think the law should be altered so that it would be easier to help patients end their suffering? Why or why not?

Unit 2.13 - Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide? Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms		
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes
prevention	(n.) - avoidance	prevent prevents preventing		unpreventable preventive preventable
critical	(adj.) - against, not supporting	critically	critic	non-critical uncritical criticize critique
pursue	(v.) - to follow; to engage in	pursues pursued pursuing	pursuit pursuer	pursuant pursuance
alter	(v.) - to change	alters altered altering	alteration	unalterable
approach	(n.) - method	approaches (pl.) approach (v.) approached approaching		unapproachable approachable approachability

Unit 2.13 -

Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide?

Problem of the Week



In 1997, Oregon passed the Death with Dignity Act (DWDA). This act allowed doctors to prescribe lethal drugs to certain seriously ill patients. Some people are glad that the law was **altered**, but others are **critical** of the change. Why do some patients decide to **pursue** the right to die?

Option 1: Each year in Oregon, some seriously ill people make a decision to die by assisted suicide. In 2006, approximately forty-eight percent of these people said they chose this **approach** because they were in pain. Medical care could not **prevent** their suffering. Which decimal is equivalent to 48%?

- A) .48
- ☒ B) 48
- C) .048
- D) .0048

Option 2: In 2006, 22 of the people who decided to die by assisted suicide in Oregon said they chose this **approach** because they were in pain. Medical care could not **prevent** their suffering. If this was approximately 48% of the total number of people who died by assisted suicide, how many people died through assisted suicide in all?

Answer: 46

Discussion Question: Patients give different reasons for **pursuing** assisted suicide. Understanding why people want to die is **critical** to making laws about this issue. What if a high percentage of many people began using assisted suicide as a way to **prevent** high medical costs for their families? Would this **alter** your view of assisted suicide?

Oregon.gov Department of Human Services. (n.d.). Oregon's death with dignity act – 2006. Retrieved on October 23, 2010 from <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/docs/year9.pdf>

Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide?

Debating the Issue



I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Doctors should assist patients who are terminally ill to commit suicide.

B Doctors should never end a patient's life. Their job is to help their patients live, not die.

C Some patients may think they want to die but can't make this decision because they lack judgment. A doctor could make a terrible mistake by helping a patient who is not sure of his/her decision.

D A person's family should make or, at the very least, be included in the final decision. A group of caring people along with a doctor should make the final decision based on the patient's best interests.

E _____

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Unit 2.13 - Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide? Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Jorge supports assisted suicide, but Lisa is **critical** of the practice.

“Most very sick people consider the idea of assisted suicide only if they feel they are a burden to their families. If we had better ways of taking care of people, we could **prevent** people from considering this **approach**,” Lisa says.

“Is that true?” Jorge asks. “If it is, maybe I would **alter** my opinion.”

“Actually, I have some data on this difficult topic,” says Professor Kahn. “The State of Oregon keeps a record of the end-of-life concerns of those who **pursue** legal assisted suicide.”

Question:

What are the common end-of-life concerns of individuals who pursue legal assisted suicide?

Hypothesis:

Most people choose suicide because they feel they are a burden to their families

Materials:

- ▶ data from the Oregon Death with Dignity Act official annual report

TEACHER Real Research

The State of Oregon provides a report yearly with statistics related to the Death with Dignity Act. For more information, go to <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/>

Classroom Discussion

Even though burden to family may not be the most common concern, perhaps the fact that 167 cases included it means that Lisa's position is still quite valid? Please help your students understand that statistics alone cannot be used to determine what is or is not ethical.

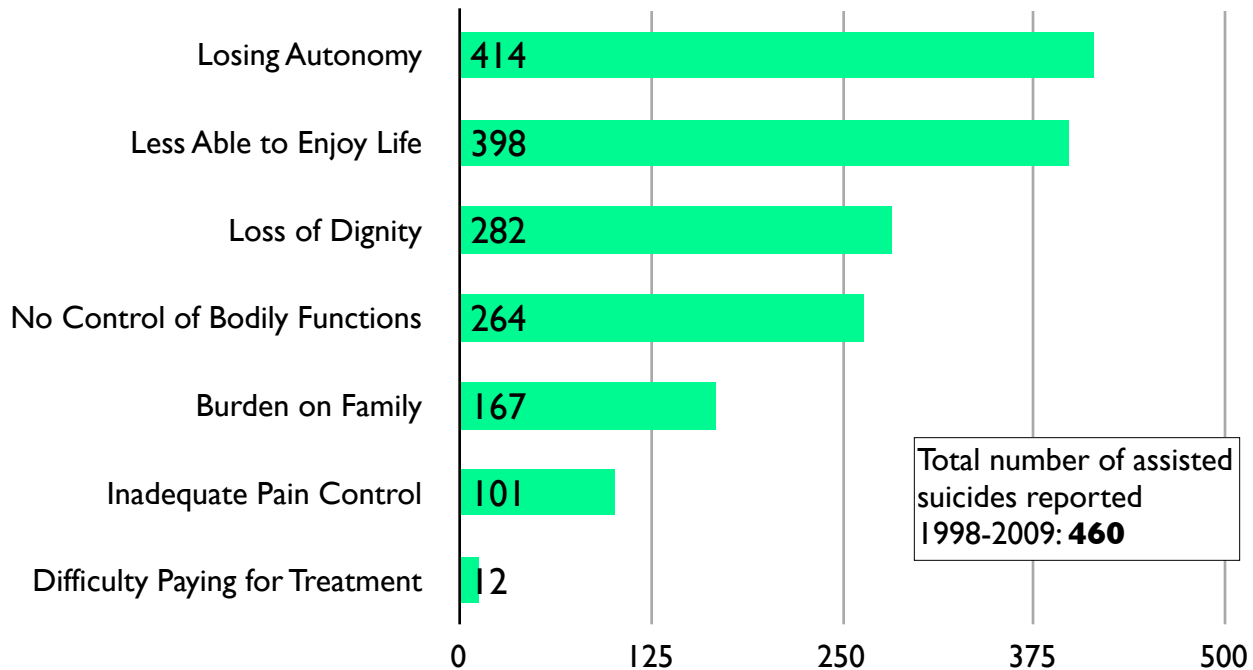
Also ask students if they feel that science can help make sound ethical decisions.

Procedure:

1. Review data from legal assisted suicides.
2. Determine if “burden to family” is the main reason people choose legal assisted suicide

Data:

End of life concerns expressed by people who legally committed assisted suicide in Oregon 1998-2009



Conclusion:

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pas/>

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Not supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Burden on family is a common concern, but was expressed in less than half of the Oregon cases reported. Please help your students understand that statistics alone cannot be used to determine what is or is not ethical.

How would you make this a better study?



Writing Prompt

Should doctors be allowed to assist seriously ill patients with suicide?

Focus Words

prevention | critical | pursue | alter | approach

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

[illegible]