

I am a Saint Paul physician and surgeon. 29 years in practice at time of my diagnosis. Two and half years ago I was diagnosed at Mayo with Stage 4 Mantle Cell Lymphoma, with mets to my chest, spleen liver, neck, legs, and entire bone marrow. Average survival is 2-5 years. 10 year survival is 5%. I assumed it was over for me. One month after diagnosis, I prepared for death, bought my cemetery plot, put the gravestone in the ground with my name on it, paid the funeral costs upfront. I then received 7 months of heavy IV chemo through a port in my chest wall---after which further tests showed tumor still in my blood and bone marrow. My despair was real. My only hope was a bone marrow transplant. I received the further “scorched earth policy” chemo the week before the transplant. IV chemo with 5 agents, 6 hours/day for 5 days, delivered by nurses in hazmat suits, kept in hospital isolation, to kill every cell in me; wipe my slate clean. Then received the bone marrow transplant.

The next 4 weeks were critical. since my immune system, GI tract, hair and even skin had sloughed out of me. With no immunity, no hair, no functioning GI tract, back to my weight from 8th grade, I sweated high fevers as hospital bugs attacked my compromised body. I wanted to end it. I needed 4 weeks survival for the bone graft to grow in my bone marrow to gain life.

If my family listened to my pleas to want it to end, I would now be in my cemetery plot; not writing this letter.

The doctors explained my circumstances, the prognosis, the uncertainty.

“Compassion and Choices”—really?

Would it have been compassionate for my doctors to inform me of the legitimacy of my choice/desire for death? No. My mind was clear, I was on no drugs impairing my choice. Only the pressure of wanting the despair and malaise to end.

It was not a legitimate choice.

With this legislation neither my family nor my doctors, would have been able to stop my choosing death. My wife as my POA couldn't stop me. My mind was not impaired. My spirits were perhaps. Even if I didn't want death, this legislation would obligate my doctors, mid-level providers, and nurses to inform, and would be free to even encourage, such an option.

Compassion literally means “to suffer with”. Both I and my doctors suffer these uncertainties. I am grateful they recognized the reality that we do not have the answers to allow such legislation.

This legislation denies the reality in which we live with our health. There are no guarantees in our prescribed treatments.

As a doctor..., as a patient with the ongoing uncertainty of 18 more months of chemo planned..., as a family member...I beg you to oppose this legislation.

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