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## Main content

Article Preview :

In *Death and Dignity*, a recent book written to foster the public debate on physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, Dr. Timothy Quill, a primary care physician and internist, advances his perspective on the care of patients with intolerable end-of-life suffering. The book is an initial effort to broaden the discussion of "balancing a reverence for life with the belief that death should come with dignity." An appendix includes practical details on living wills and health care proxy forms to encourage readers to adopt advance directives.

Dr. Quill uses the book to issue a series of directives to the public, physicians, medical institutions, and governments to "take charge and make change" to improve the care of dying patients. The change he proposes is to support legalization of physician-assisted suicide but not active euthanasia. He details the potential clinical criteria that should be employed and advocates this approach as a humane and compassionate way to care for the dying patient.

Dr. Ira Byock's recent review of Quill's proposed guidelines (*American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care*, March-April 1993), frames the issues well. He writes, "The very phenomenon of physicians discussing criteria for legalizing assisted suicide is ironic, and should make us feel a bit queasy, since it is physicians who have been largely responsible for the problems of intolerable suffering and the subsequent public outcry for aid in dying."

Dr. Quill's proposal needs to be refuted and the facts clarified. The book capitalizes on the current doctor-hospital bashing mode to try to make its point. Using case discussions, Dr. Quill graphically demonstrates the frequent failures and rare successes of what he terms "comfort care" for dying patients. His language is inflammatory and the examples he uses to inform the public...

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Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making . Quill, Timothy E. (1991-03-07). In a Sounding Board essay, a physician recounts his experience with an adult patient diagnosed with acute myelomonocytic leukemia. Timothy E. Quill. This book looks squarely at how patients can make crucial decisions and take charge of the end of their lives. This book is a resource for anyone who fears unnecessary suffering and excessive medical intervention at that point. It helps readers think through and then complete advance directives, and also to take a more active role when they or a family member becomes terminally ill. Through real-life stories and his own experience, Dr. Quill explores what measures a patient can choose to prolong life and how to forgo such measures if they begin to extend a painful death, choo "Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making." *New England Journal of Medicine* 324 (10):691–94. Quill, T.E. (1993). *Death and Dignity: Making Choices and Taking Charge*. New York: W.W. Norton. Stack, S. (1998). "The Relationships between Culture and Suicide: An Analysis of African Americans." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 35 (2):253–69. Watson, J. (1997). *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition*. *Death and Dignity* is about taking charge of your illness, no matter how serious. It emphasizes the necessity for honest dialogue between you and your doctor, including a thorough discussion of your feelings about death and dying. Doctors and patients must work together to investigate all health care options, from the most aggressive to those that emphasize comfort and the relief of suffering. Dr. Timothy Quill put his career in danger when he wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that he had assisted a terminally ill patient in suicide - at her request - by prescribing pills and letting her know how to take a lethal dose. He had treated "Diane" for many years, had seen her through other serious illnesses, and had responded to her desire to leave this world with her dignity still intact.