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Human Ethics: The Morals behind the Death with Dignity Act:

Research Proposal

Individuals have their own say in whether something is right or wrong. These beliefs form through experiences in one's life. Children may be told smoking at a young age or all together is bad, so their morals include smoking as a wrong decision. With morals being formed at a young age, I wondered how the topic of death revolves around such beliefs. The US, although limited to a few states, has an act that allows people to take their own life. The Death with Dignity Act is meant for terminally ill people, but even then people may have their own views on an act that grants the choice of dying to an individual. This paper will attempt to answer the question, is the Death with Dignity Act ethically sound? People who suffer a life-threatening illness, or are aware they don't have much time to live, should be able to make their own decisions. People have a choice, and they have the right to take it or leave it based on their own beliefs. From my understanding, only three states allow death with dignity.

I plan on looking for articles that inform readers about the Death with Dignity Act. I want to look for scholarly sources on the formation of ethics and morals, so I can expand on that concept. I will also be using articles, either online or through a library, that informs readers about the Death with Dignity Act. Terms I plan on using when searching through the library database are death with dignity and ethics and morals, which should provide different perspectives on the law. I will look for primary sources to compare viewpoints on the idea of ending one's life: someone who plans to use the act to their benefit may differ from a person who knows of someone using the act.

Challenges I foresee with my research topic are not finding the necessary scholarly sources I need to write an effective paper. I feel that defining ethics and morals will be a bit difficult, especially when talking about how they are formed. Most individuals may see the Death with Dignity Act as legally allowing suicide, so I fear I may not find many articles in support of the act. I will overcome these obstacles by doing extensive searching. If I can not find what I need in a library, I will look for reliable and credible online sources to aid in my research. Looking at different newspaper sources should result in various perspectives on the act.

Annotated Bibliography

Working Thesis: Although individuals view assisted suicide as unethical through their beliefs, the Death with Dignity Act is ethically sound as it allows patients a right to end their sufferings.

Despite assisted suicide being viewed as unethical through individuals' beliefs, the Death with Dignity Act allows patients a right to end their sufferings.

Andre, Claire, and Manuel Velasquez. "Assisted Suicide: A Right or a Wrong?" *Markkula Center For Applied Ethics*. Santa Clara University, n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/ie/v1n1/suicide.html>>.

The article begins with an anecdote about two brothers. One of them is expected to die, in pain, pleading for life's end. The other, Harold, answers his brother's request and shoots him, ending his life. The article continues with the explanation of advancements in medicine. A pill was created that could shorten the life, or essentially, end the life of someone. The pill, however, is meant for terminally ill people, or those who feel an extensive amount of pain from their illness, such as Matthew Donnelly. Advances in technology helped relieve people of pain, but is explained that it also allows people to live longer than they should be. With the creation of the pill, people are said to have a "moral right" to end their life, if they so choose to. The point of the article is to inform people that those who are terminally ill have a choice in how they want their life to end, since they control their own life.

This source is reliable since a college site wrote and published it. The web domain ends in .edu, which, often times, indicates that it is a reliable website. There is no date, so it can not be determined if it is a recent article. I plan on using the ideas provided in this article as an explanation to why people have the right to end their life, under the right conditions. The

mention of a moral right adds to the idea that depending on what the person believes is right or wrong, their decision on the Death with Dignity Act will be affected.

"Coloradoan Editorial: Support Passage of Right-to-die Legislation." *Coloradoan*. Gannett, 2015. Web. 25 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.coloradoan.com/story/opinion/2015/10/25/death-dignity-coloradoan/74424436/>>.

This editorial mentions a right-to-die law that was recently passed in California. It mentions a bit of history regarding the Death with Dignity Act and even mentions the states that currently allow assisted suicide. Statistics are provided, mentioning the amount of people who prescribed for lethal pills, and the amount of people who actually ingested the pills. There are numerous steps one has to take in order to have prescription to the lethal pills, which prevents handing the pills out to anyone. The author of the editorial makes it clear that there are risks to the prescription, and there are groups of people who do not agree with the practice. Nevertheless, the author believes that people have options, depending on one's viewpoint on the matter.

The source is a secondary source, as it recalls information already presented to the public. The information is mainly repeated from other articles. Since this is an editorial, the author is presenting their opinion on the Death with Dignity Act. This is a credible source as it references other sources within the editorial. Although this editorial supports my argument, I may not use it since it is basically a repeat of information about the Death with Dignity Act. The opinion on the issue, however, could be used as an example to show support for my stance.

Coombs Lee, Barbara. "Oregon's Experience With Aid In Dying: Findings From The Death With Dignity Laboratory." *Annals Of The New York Academy Of Sciences* 1330.1 (2014): 94-100.

Academic Search Complete. Web. 9 Oct. 2015.

<<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/nyas.12486/abstract>>.

This article mentions how Oregon was the first state to allow aid in death. It goes over the type of people who use the DWDA and the amount of people that die through this act. It provides reasoning behind the act, focusing their research on risks faced through the act. Through the risks and information gathered, there's a conclusion on whether or not more people should know about the DWDA.

This source gathers information through government reports, making it a credible and reliable source. Information is also gathered through scientific investigations, so other people's findings are used. Since information is gathered from other sources, and it provides its own conclusions using the data, this is a secondary, scholarly source: found through the library databases. I will use this source in my paper since it shows a good contrast to both sides of the argument. It also has data that I can include to enhance my position.

"Death with Dignity Act." *Oregon.gov*. Oregon Health Authority, n.d. Web. 8 Oct. 2015.

<<http://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Pages/index.aspx>>.

The site mentions that the Death with Dignity Act was enacted in Oregon in October 27, 1997. Statistical information is held here with people who choose to use the Act. Information such as how many prescriptions were given since 1998 is included, along with the amount of deaths through the DWDA until 2014. This source focuses on Oregon's citizens and even has information about the physicians who give the prescriptions to their patients.

The source has a lot of statistical information, and comes from an Oregon website. Considering how this site keeps track of patient and physician information, it is a primary

source. What further makes it a library source is the web address of .gov, which means the information provided comes from a government source, so, for the most part, it is a reliable source. I would use these statistics in my paper, since it would help me in letting my audience know that people do take advantage of the act. However, this could also prove that the DWDA isn't being used properly, which I will have to counter.

Mateu, Belen Matesanz. "Advance Statements: Legal And Ethical Implications. (Cover Story)."

Nursing Standard 21.2 (2006): 41-45. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 Oct. 2015.

<<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c6897c5e-d0de-44d1-9014-8f7af5791ada%40sessionmgr198&vid=1&hid=101>>.

Advance statements are reviewed in this article. The information provided here is directed towards nurses and how they should deal with decisions made by their patients. Patients have the right to say if they want a procedure to be made, as is mentioned through the Human Rights Act discussed in this article. However, the patient must be able to give or deny consent to a decision, to which nurses oblige to their choice. If a patient isn't able to give consent then a nurse has to figure out if they prepared a choice ahead of time in the case that an event like that occurs. The article informs people that patients have the right to make a decision that concerns their health, with the appropriate information given to them before making said decision.

Using this article would be helpful in expanding on my stance to my topic. It mentions people having a right to decide what they wish to do, with the exception that people need to be able to consent to the choice they made. The source is a primary source, as it seems like an article that informs nurses on how to care for their patients. The source is reliable and credible since it was found through the library databases. Aside from being found through the databases,

the source contains many references so the reader many check for themselves where the author got some of their information.

McCormack, Paula. "Quality Of Life And The Right To Die: An Ethical Dilemma." *Journal Of Advanced Nursing* 28.1 (1998): 63-69. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 Oct. 2015. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=5277959&site=ehost-live>>.

McCormack discusses the issue behind euthanasia, which is essentially the practice patients go through when dying with dignity. The author mentions that death with dignity is mainly used by terminally ill people, but this tests the “quality of life” of individuals. People then have to make their own decisions on what they believe is right. The article further mentions that it will discuss this dilemma through an example of an actual patient who wishes to die. This will explain the positions of those who have to care for the patients and talk about the legal and moral issues behind the situation.

The article includes a first hand account of a patient who wishes to go through with the DWDA, so this is a primary, scholarly source. I would use this source as it could serve as a great counter argument for my paper. This paper seems to lean more towards why death with dignity is unethical, since it mentions that people may get a choice in practicing the act, but wants to discuss the legal and moral issues behind it. I will also be able to use this as a source to define euthanasia, since, essentially, that is what the Death with Dignity Act allows.

Rich, Ben A. "Suicidality, Refractory Suffering, And The Right To Choose Death." *American Journal Of Bioethics* 13.3 (2013): 18-20. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 Oct. 2015. <<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=280ae1f2-d917-490a-830b-cdddf5c089b5%40sessionmgr114&hid=101>>.

The author, Rich, focuses on the fact that individuals have a choice when it comes to ending their life. With these choices, however, come risks. A physician may never know if the patient is suicidal or if decision making by the patient is impacted by their mental illness. These possible outcomes is what makes it difficult to properly proscribe a patient pills to end their life. A previous study is used throughout this article to explain the dangers of ending one's life.

The article once again provides an opposing view towards my paper. With the concern of patients being incapable of properly making an important decision for themselves, this could give me a chance to analyze who can and cannot make the choice to end their life. This is a secondary article since it uses a study conducted by a different group and analyzes that study. The article is reliable as it cites the study it analyzes and references other sources. The article was also found through the library databases.

Sanburn, Josh. "How Brittany Maynard Could Revive the Stalled 'Death With Dignity Act' Movement."

Time. Time, 2 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Sept. 2015. <<http://time.com/3551089/brittany-maynard-death-with-dignity/>>.

This article mentions a woman, Brittney Maynard, who used her right to the Death with Dignity Act and ended her life. The act was in play since 1993, but people became more aware of the law after Brittney Maynard's journey and choice to end her life when she felt it was time, rather than having cancer end it for her. With this, people began to see how the Death with Dignity Act could help terminally ill people. Others hold the belief that the law prevents people's lives from having equal meaning; that allowing people to die instead of protecting them makes their life unimportant. The author of the article wanted people to know that the Death with Dignity Act has suitable users like Brittney Maynard, and is a right not used by just older people.

Although the article has great information from both side of the argument, such as a religious view point. I may not use the source in my paper. The article is recent, being only a year old. The article is detailed in that it provides years for when events that it mentions occurred. If I were to use it, I would use the religious viewpoint mentioned in the article as an example of various views on the Death with Dignity Act, and how morals influence the decision or acceptance of the act.

Sullivan, Stephen. "The Right To Die: A Discussion Of 'Rational Suicide'." *Mental Health Practice* 14.6 (2011): 32-34. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 Oct. 2015.

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=9&sid=280ae1f2-d917-490a-830b-cddd5c089b5%40sessionmgr114&hid=101>.

“Rational Suicide” is how this article addresses the Death with Dignity Act, leading to the idea that people need to have an appropriate reason to legally end their life. It acknowledges the fact that the media informs most people who end their life through the act are terminally, or chronically, ill. However, there are instances where people who seem perfectly fine wish to use the act to their advantage. In this case, patients and physicians must come to an understanding of who is able to use the pill and who isn't. The article goes through discussions between a physician and patient before the final decision, and the morals behind such choices.

This article is a primary, scholarly source as it accounts for stories not otherwise told through the media. The source is reliable and credible since it was found through the library databases, and it references other sources. I plan on using this source as the an exception to the Death with Dignity Act. Although I agree to the act, there are instances that may occur that make the act unethical. With the information provided in this source, I hope to provide a sort of solution or suggestion to people who find the DWDA unethical.

Wilkinson, Signe. "Partial Death Distortion." Cartoon. *Philadelphia Daily News*, 22 Oct. 2013. Web. <<http://www.cartoonistgroup.com/subject/The-End+Of+Life-Comics-and-Cartoons-by-Signe+Wilkinson's+Editorial+Cartoons.php>>.

The political cartoon has several people present in a patient's room. The individuals to the patient's bedside represent the Florida government, one of which has a button that says, "Pro-Life." On the patient's side, there's an I.V. that has the name "Terri Schiavo." The patient, Terri, is connected to a machine, which is presumed to be keeping her alive. The artist is showing a perspective of suspending death. The political leaders believe they helped a patient live longer, but the patient is living off of tubes. The political cartoonist, Signe Wilkinson, may believe people have a right to die if they're in a condition similar to the patient in the picture.

This cartoon is a secondary source since it's a drawing of a situation, but not a first hand account of the situation taking place in the picture. The cartoon further proves my argument about suspending life. I may use this source since it illustrates to the audience a potential scenario regarding the morals on life and death. This cartoon also challenges the political viewpoints alongside ethics.