Readers Symposium

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Reader Symposium

Dear Readers:

The term *symposium*, as you may know, refers to the custom of the Greeks to come together for drinking and talking. With this first issue of 2001, we offer a recurring column of your comments and letters on these pages. We hope this symposium can be as full of insightful comment and lively debate as elder law meetings. —Ed.

Dear Editor:

On the way back from Philadelphia, I had the opportunity to read your editorial view in the publication where you requested information regarding the right of the patient to die. [Vol. 1, No. 4, Spring 2000] In my practice, which concentrates significantly on elder law, I have unfortunately had to deal with several difficult situations regarding death. One of the situations involved a client who did not have the medicinal means to take her life and committed suicide by jumping out of a window. To say the least, this was probably a very difficult decision for her and caused significant stress and emotional upheaval within the family after her demise.

Another situation, which was difficult for myself, was when a client hanged himself. As a Public Administrator in Massachusetts, I often receive phone calls from the medical examiner when family members are not to be found or there is no evidence of next of kin. Most of the situations involve deaths that are of natural causes, but often times, difficult circumstances surround the death. In this particular case, the client was losing his eyesight and was concerned that doctors were going to substantially diminish his assets by forcing him to pay for surgery. This man had no family members or support within the community and, as he was not a well man, he elected to take his own life within his home.

To say the least, these are difficult decisions for the elder to make, and they appear to be desperate acts of choice not to live as opposed to dying. Possibly, most of these individuals could have received counseling and, if they wished to take their lives, it could have been done with dignity and less pain, both mentally and physically. If you wish any further information that I am permitted to provide in these cases, I will be pleased to answer questions in order to allow the laws to change in an attempt to alleviate the pain.

Very truly yours,

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