

The Gazette

GUEST COLUMN: Against Colorado's proposed assisted suicide bill

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My name is Dana Palmer. In 2005, I was diagnosed with Glioblastoma-terminal brain cancer. My prognosis was only 3-12 months. Shortly after my diagnosis, my doctor received a form asking, "When will the patient recover sufficiently?" He drew a horizontal line through it, and wrote never!

My experience is similar to that of thousands of Coloradans who every year face terminal diagnoses and the stigma that they don't have a chance to live, and may be better off dead!

Assisted suicide only worsens this stigma.

After surviving my terminal prognosis for 10 years, I heard the story of the young California woman named Brittany Maynard who faced the same disease I did, and at the exact same age. She took her cancer story public, and it was used to headline a national effort to "normalize" assisted suicide. Immediately, she and other assisted suicide supporters sent a message to patients across the country: Assisted suicide is for you" and "There is no reason for hope." This is a very dangerous message for current and future patients!

Assisted suicide supporters call it a "choice," but to people facing a diagnosis like mine it can be interpreted as an obligation since many patients already feel like a burden. At any time after a terminal diagnosis emotions can run wild, and minds often change daily regarding treatment and care. But assisted suicide is final, it's an action that can't be undone. It can leave doctors and loved ones with regrets.

Under a bill currently proposed in Colorado, I would be eligible for assisted suicide based on my diagnosis. I would be permitted to see any doctor regardless of whether I had a previous relationship with them, and receive a lethal prescription in just a matter of days. Recently, I had a recurrence and battled my insurance company for a month to try to get approval for an out of network consultation at a major cancer facility that specializes in brain cancer. While I was appealing their decision, the cancer became more aggressive!

Sadly, had I asked for a lethal prescription - saving them hundreds of thousands of dollars - it would have likely been approved the same day and I would be dead right now! My family would not be required to know, and I would not be required to be evaluated by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

My journey hasn't been easy; however, people facing serious or terminal diseases have much better options than assisted suicide. And while no option is perfect, assisted suicide legalization sends a dangerous message to people like me about what the government thinks is my best option. I urge the Colorado Legislature to reject the idea that lethal drugs are an answer to serious illness or terminal diagnoses.

Ultimately, physician assisted suicide takes away the patient's choice to fight and live, and puts the power in the hands of doctors (that may have limited experience with the diagnosis and long term survivors) in a profit-driven health care system or to over-burdened caregivers.

Why should anyone die before their time, if in fact there may be a reason for hope?