

Woman's suicide prompts concerns over right to die

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Word that a physician who advocates euthanasia helped a woman commit suicide with a so-called "suicide machine" that sends life-ending drugs into her veins has sparked several sharp criticisms of the incident.

Mixed in with the criticisms were some measures of support for the move, along with questions asking when — or if — anyone should be given help to commit suicide.

The death of Janet Adkins, 54, of Portland, Ore., with the help of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a retired physician from suburban Detroit, is believed to be the first known U.S. instance of medically assisted suicide.

Laurie Anne Ramsey, spokeswoman for the Chicago-based Americans United for Life, said, "This kind of thing is the next step in terms of the devaluing of human life."

The suicide of Mrs. Adkins, who was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, took place June 4 at a public campground in Holly, Mich., outside of Detroit, because it had electrical outlets needed to run the suicide machine.

Kevorkian, 62, told *The New York Times* that he did not commit murder because Mrs. Adkins pushed the button that administered the fatal drugs. All he did, he said, was insert the tubes through which the drugs flowed.

After Kevorkian dripped a saline solution through the tube, Mrs. Adkins pushed a button that released thiopental, which

causes unconsciousness. The machine after a minute stopped the thiopental flow, replacing it with potassium chloride, which stops the heart and brings death within minutes.

Condemnations of the physician-assisted suicide were quick and many.

Vincenian Father John Gouldrick, director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, said in a written statement, "The immorality of suicide and physician-assisted suicide is clear ... No one was enriched by (Mrs. Adkins') decision or that of Dr. Kevorkian" in assisting in the act.

Mrs. Adkins died in Kevorkian's Volkswagen van at the campground.

Kevorkian and Mrs. Adkins met over a meal at a nearby restaurant shortly before the suicide at which Kevorkian gave his consent to her wish to commit suicide.

Mrs. Adkins' husband, Ron, told a Portland television station that "it's not a matter of how long you live but the quality of the life you live, and it was her life and her decision and she chose."

But James Bopp Jr., general counsel to the National Right to Life Committee, said, "You cannot accept the quality of life as a standard. First you withdraw the respirators, then the food and then you actively kill people. It's a straight line from one place to the others."

In a 1987 article, Kevorkian said he fully expected to be arrested after supervising the death of his first patient, but would defend himself in court to force government, the public and organized medicine to face the issue.

An Oakland County Circuit Court judge June 8 issued a temporary restraining order telling Kevorkian to stop using the machine and to not use any other means to assist in a suicide.

Unlike most states, Michigan has no law against assisting suicide, but Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson said his office was investigating whether other charges may be brought against Kevorkian.



AP/Wide World Photos
REMEMBERING TIANANMEN — A young boy gazes at newsmen after laying flowers alongside those of some 300 other protesters who gathered near the Chinese embassy in Paris, June 4, to commemorate the first anniversary of China's crackdown on pro-democracy students in Tiananmen Square, Beijing.

Coffee boycott angers Salvadoran bishops

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Salvadoran bishops' conference, angered by a National Council of Churches call for a boycott of Salvadoran coffee by U.S. companies, is urging U.S. Catholics to ignore the boycott.

In an open letter published by Salvadoran newspapers in early June, the bishops asked the U.S. Catholic Conference to let U.S. Catholics know they were deeply opposed to the coffee boycott proposed by the New York-based national council because it would be a "harsh blow to the fragile economy" of El Salvador.

"We reject completely the Salvadoran coffee boycott as being an attack against justice since it harms indiscriminately not only the coffee growers but the people as well whose livelihood is from working with coffee," the Salvadoran bishops said.

Oscar Bolioli, director of the Latin

America office for the National Council of Churches, said the organization called for the boycott to force the government to be sincere in upcoming peace talks with leftist rebels known as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front.

Bolioli said that after years of unsuccessful talks with Salvadoran government and community leaders about the need to strive for peace, the council — made up of 32 churches, mainly Protestant — called for a boycott by U.S. businesses, which are said to import about 5 percent of their coffee from El Salvador.

Thomas Quigley, the U.S. bishops' adviser for Latin American affairs, said the U.S. bishops had "not taken a stand" on the boycott and had complied with the Salvadoran bishops' request to tell U.S. Catholics and the council of their opposition to the boycott.

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