

PENNSYLVANIA MEDICAL SOCIETY
TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 637
HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
HONORABLE THOMAS R. CALTAGIRONE, CHAIRMAN
NOVEMBER 7, 1990

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GOOD AFTERNOON, MY NAME IS DR. MARY JO BONNER. I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME BEFORE YOU TODAY AS A PHYSICIAN AND AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PENNSYLVANIA MEDICAL SOCIETY'S BIOETHICS COMMISSION TO STATE MY VIEWS ON PHYSICIAN PARTICIPATION IN EXECUTIONS. I ASK THAT PHYSICIANS NOT PARTICIPATE IN AN EXECUTION. THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICIAN IS TO BE A CAREGIVER, TO ACT AS INTERMEDIARY FOR THE PATIENT. AS SUCH THE PHYSICIAN IS TRUSTED TO CARE FOR THE PATIENT. TO BE AN EXECUTIONER IS NOT THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICIAN.

TO EXECUTE BY LETHAL INJECTION:

1. AN INTRAVENOUS ACCESS IS NEEDED;
2. PRE-EXECUTION TRANQUILIZERS ARE USUALLY GIVEN;
3. A PARALYTIC AGENT AND LETHAL DOSE OF SHORT-ACTING BARBITURATE ARE GIVEN;
4. PULSE AND RESPIRATIONS ARE MONITORED; AND
5. PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH IS MADE.

NONE OF THESE STEPS SHOULD INVOLVE A PHYSICIAN EXCEPT FOR THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH. IN FACT, PHYSICIAN INVOLVEMENT MAY BE IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO A REGULATION PROMULGATED BY THE STATE BOARD OF MEDICINE WHICH DEFINES AS UNETHICAL OR IMMORAL CONDUCT "POSSESSING, USING, PRESCRIBING FOR USE OR DISTRIBUTING A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE OR A LEGEND DRUG IN A WAY OTHER THAN FOR AN ACCEPTABLE MEDICAL PURPOSE."

WHEN WE STAND TO TAKE OUR OATH AS PHYSICIANS, WE ARE DEDICATING OURSELVES TO A LIFE'S WORK OF TREATING THE SICK WITH THE HOPE OF IMPROVING THEIR LIVES. WE TRY TO MAINTAIN HEALTH IN THOSE NOT ILL AND WHEN AN ILLNESS EXTENDS BEYOND OUR ART AND SCIENCE, TO AT LEAST GIVE COMFORT. PLEASE DO NOT BY LEGISLATIVE BREATH OR PEN STRIP US OF OUR ROLE IN SOCIETY. INSTEAD, I ASK YOU: I CHALLENGE YOU TO ASSIST US TO BE FOREVER CARING FOR ALL OF THE CITIZENS OF OUR GREAT COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, WE CAN ACCEPT SENATE BILL 637 AS LONG AS IT IS NOT AMENDED TO REQUIRE PHYSICIAN INVOLVEMENT BEYOND MAKING A PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TODAY, AND I WOULD BE GLAD TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

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