

Euthanasia in Cancer Patients, Islamic Point of View

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Abstract

Background: Euthanasia is an important subject that concerns law and medicine as well as morality and religion in the 21st century. Euthanasia has become a challengeable problem in scientific arena. In some countries, legal and medical practitioners are allowed to kill those cancer patients who suffer from excessive pain while incur enormous amount of expenses for their treatments.

Methods: We used 3 main sources to find Islamic views on euthanasia: First, the Islamic primary source, the Holy Quran, which is the most important and reliable source for finding Islamic perspectives. Second, traditions (hadith) which include Prophet Mohammad's and his relatives's (Imams) advices. Third, religious opinions and decrees (Fatwas) from great Muslim scholars who are called Mofiti Al-Azham in Sunni tradition and Ayatollah Al-Ozma in Shiite tradition.

Results: Based on the reasons proposed in the references, it can be concluded that euthanasia is forbidden in Islamic theology; and no types of euthanasia are allowed or accepted in Islam; and any action whether voluntary or involuntary that results in euthanasia of cancer patients is considered suicide and is strongly forbidden in Islam.

Conclusion: Euthanasia is purely illegal in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In this study, we introduced a religious law based on Islamic point of view and Emamyeh section in Islam. To investigate the sensitive issue of euthanasia in Islam, the Holy Quran as the fundamental reference of Islamic law and Sonnah as the reference of Hadith (Traditions) were studied.

Key words: Euthanasia; Religion; Suicide; Islamic law; Cancer patient

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Introduction

Euthanasia is the deliberate killing of a person for his/her benefit. The word euthanasia comes from the Greek words: ΕΥΘΑΝΑΣΙΑ (-ΕΥ, eu, "good"), and ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ, (thanatos, death) [1]. It is also identified as "the merciful hastening of death, often limited to willful and merciful actions to kill one who is injured or terminally ill [2]. Due to the advancement of medical science, life span has been increased; and with the changes in life style, the patterns of common diseases have also changed. Nowadays, while most of incurable diseases are being treated, many diseases, such as cancer, which impose great pain and suffering upon the patients are still common. The most important expression related to this problem is euthanasia. Active euthanasia is defined as a physician's deliberate act to cause a patient's death by directly administering a lethal dose of medication or other agent [3]. Islam, categorically forbids all forms of suicide and

any action that may help individuals to kill themselves. It is forbidden for a Muslim to plan, or determine the time of his own death in advance. For example, if an individual is suffering from a terminal illness, is it permissible for him/her to refuse medication and/or resuscitation. There are various ethical issues that can affect patients and their families in the health care setting. There are also many complex issues in the field of cancer diagnosis and management. Some of them are raised by the new possibilities in technology. Progress in cancer care and cancer prevention arises from advances in genetics, genomics, proteomics, cell biology, immunology, molecular epidemiology, bioinformatics; and behavioural sciences. The approaches to cancer management are changing and patients are living longer. The places of care (e.g. hospital, hospice, home), and the relationship between ethical and clinical considerations are among the main issues of practical concerns in cancer care. In this paper, we aimed to consider ethical issues concerning cancer

and to explain Islamic viewpoints through some cases.

Basic and Concepts

Definition of Euthanasia: It is defined differently by various researchers; however, the definition selected for this study is as follows; "the murder of a patient who is suffering from an incurable disease by a physician". Euthanasia has been divided into different types:

Active Euthanasia: In this type of euthanasia, an action is deliberately taken to cause death, such as injecting a drug that results in death.

Passive Euthanasia: This type of euthanasia involves prohibiting a patient from some kind of care that helps him or her to stay alive.

Voluntary Euthanasia: It can be referred to a patient who chooses to die voluntarily; however, it should be considered that the patient should have enough mental soundness to make such a choice or have the ability to control himself.

Involuntary Euthanasia: To kill a patient without his or her permission.

Materials and Methods

We used 3 main sources to find Islamic views on euthanasia: First, the Islamic primary source, the Holy Quran, which is the most important and reliable source for finding Islamic perspectives. Second, Islamic traditions (Hadith), which include Prophet Mohammad's and his relatives' (Imam) advices. Particularly from Imam Bagher and Imam Sadegh the 5th and the 6th Imams of shia. Third, religious opinions and decrees (Fatwas) from great Muslim scholars, who are called Mofti Al-Azham in the Sunni tradition and Ayatollah Al-Ozma in the Shiite tradition. These Fatwas are important due to the jurisprudential nature of such bioethical topics in Islamic communities. These Fatwas are the uppermost jurisprudential dicta among most of Muslims. For the purpose of this study, we searched the wholly Quran for related verses about suicide and homicide, and selected some of them in the discussion section; we also included some Fatwas and comments from the shia leaders (Imams).

Discussion

In some western countries, there are special laws for euthanasia, but still many countries are against euthanasia and physician assisted suicides. However, many would agree to legalization of the death of patients who suffer from advanced stages of cancer [6, 7, 8].

Examining Islamic sources led us to 3 principles to examine and analyze euthanasia, and they are as follows:

- A) Illegal suicide and homicide.
- B) Necessity of self protection.
- C) Necessity of other selves' protection [9]

A-Illegal Suicide and Homicide

Quran Verses

1) Sure Al-Nes'sa, verse 29: "O you who believe! Do not devour your property among yourselves falsely, expect that it be traded by your mutual consent; and do not kill your people, surely Allah is Merciful to you" [10]. In the book "Tafsir Majmaol Bayan", this verse has been interpreted as prohibition of suicide and homicide [9]. Most jurists consults use this quotation to convey prohibition of suicide and homicide. In the book called "Tafsir Tebyan", this verse has been interpreted to have 3 meanings: suicide, homicide and extreme altruism and homicide [11].

2) Sure Al-Baqarah, verse 195: "And spend in the way of Allah and cost not yourselves to perdition with your own hands, and do well (to others); surely Allah loves the doers of good" [10]. In the book called "Tafsir Majmaol Bayan", this verse has been interpreted as the prohibition of any action that endangers humans' lives [12].

Traditions (Hadith)

1) Imam Sadegh (may peace be upon him) has uttered that if someone commits suicide deliberately, he will be burnt in hell eternally [13].

2) Imam Bagher (may peace be upon him) has also uttered that, a devoted Muslim will never commit suicide even if he is inflicted by pain or is dying by any reason [13].

These traditions and many others convey the same message, and strongly confirm the prohibition of suicide in Islam. Besides, in nearly all traditional and jurisprudence Islamic books one can find an independent section on the importance of prohibition of suicide and homicide. However, there are some exceptions: in the case of carrying out justice "Ghaza" as an Islamic punishment in which someone who has committed an offense is punished in the same way; and risking one's life is allowed if the person is fighting to please GOD [9].

Common Sense Reasons (Fatwa)

Ebne -Edris in "Saraer" has uttered that whenever someone is forced to eat carrion, he is obliged to eat it; otherwise, he is sinful (because eating carrion is illegal in Islam). The reason for such advice is removing a harm-which might damage you- is wisely

mandatory. [14]. Some Islamic researchers have stated that prohibiting suicide and homicide is essential for self protection and other selves' protection. Although suicide is purely forbidden in Islam, homicide, despite its complete prohibition, has some exceptions such as, fighting for the sake of God, and to carry out justice. Consequently, based on all Fatwas, euthanasia is illegal and forbidden.

B-Necessity of one's Self Protection

In some verses of the wholly Quran and some traditions, one can find out why self protection is considered mandatory:

1) Sure Al-Baqarah, verse 173:" He has only forbidden you what die of itself, and blood and flesh of swine, and that over which any other(name) than (that of)Allah has been invoked; but whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin shall be upon him; surely Allah is forgiving, Merciful"[10].

2) Sure Al- An'a'm, verse 145:" Say: I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat of except that it be what has died of itself, or blood poured forth, or flash or swine - for that surely is unclean - or that which is a transgression, other than (the name of) Allah having been invoked on it; but whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely your lord is forgiving, Merciful" [10].

Traditions (Hadith)

1) Imam Sadegh (may peace be upon him) has uttered : " God is aware of what brings well being and health to the human body ; and due to his benevolence, God has made legal and permissible whatever contributes to body health and well being of humans. Likewise, God is aware of what harms the humans' body. And he prohibits humans from doing anything that causes damage to their bodies. However, in case his body health and well being are dependent on the prohibited things, he is allowed to use them to the extent of his need and not more "[13].

2)Imam Sadegh (may peace be upon him) stated:" everyone who encounters a situation in which he can help himself only by eating carrion, blood or pork and he keeps not eating them as long as leads him to death, he will die while he is atheist"[13].

Common Sense (Fatwa)

In terms of the principle of the necessity of self protection, some clear reasons have been stated in the wholly Quran and in Islamic traditions that lead to common sense "Fatwa". In this regard, the jurist

consults have proposed a principle in Islamic law called the principle of necessity of self protection. Necessity leads all people for their protection. According to this principle, all types of voluntary euthanasia are considered illegal [15].

C-Necessity of Other Selves' Protection

In this section, reasons for necessity of protection of other selves' are discussed. Some jurist consults believe that the necessity of other selves' protection is axiomatic and does not need any reasoning; yet they rely on some reasons from Quran and tradition. Sure Al-Ma'edah, verse 32: "For this reason did we prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for man- slaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, all men; and certainly Our apostles came but even after that many of them certainly act extravagantly in the land" [10]. This verse can be interpreted as follows: the nature of one human being in terms of death and life is the same as death and life of all human beings. That is, he shares the nature possessed by all human beings. Therefore, the murder of one person can be equal to the murder of all human beings. ; and self protection of a person is the same as protection of all human beings.

Traditions (Hadith)

There are numerous traditions that either explicitly reason that other selves' protection is obligatory or they are implicitly in favor of the necessity of self protection. In this section some examples are mentioned:

1) A man called forat- ebne- ahnaf narrates from imam Sadegh (may peace be upon him), " if every pious Muslim deprives other pious Muslim of what he needs while he can meet his needs by himself or other, in the hereafter, he emerges while his face is black (ashamed)... when he is ordered to go to hell"[13].

2) Upon the exegesis of the thirty second verse of Al-Ma'edah Sure, Imam Sadegh (may peace be upon him) was asked a question: from what things one should be saved?

He responded, "You can save some one from burning, drowning, ferocious animals and foe"; then, after a short silence, he preceded the main underlying meaning of this verse to be accepting Islam as a follower.

3) The holy messenger uttered," if someone contributes to the murder of a Muslim, even if, with a part of a world in the hereafter he will emerge while on his forehead has been written not having faith in

Allan's mercy". With regards to the aforementioned traditions, when someone contributes to the murder of a Muslim, he lose hope to have God's mercy, and based on Islamic theology, this is the highest sin and he is certainly doomed to be tortured eternally [13].

Common Sense (Fatwa)

It can be concluded that the necessity of protection of other self is mandatory; however, according to verses and Islamic traditions, it is not purely mandatory. The major reasons that jurists rely on in the necessity of other selves' protection are those which prohibit homicide. The problem with this reasoning is obvious as the prohibition of other self does not necessarily lead to the necessity of other selves' protection. In other words, the order of necessity of other selves' protection can not necessarily be taken from the order of prohibition of homicide. In the book called "Javaher -Al- Kalam", it has been uttered that all jurists at all times strongly stated that the necessity of other self protection is mandatory based on conceptual meaning of the Holy Quran and Hadith[16]. Euthanasia is completely different from the principles we are using during the last hour of life in terminal ill patients or malignant cases that we are prohibited to act in same way which not change the quality or quantity of life in end stage cancer patients.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this article.

Authors' Contribution

SMM, conceived, designed the study, gathered data and drafted the manuscript, LKF and AA contributed to the study design and data gathering, FR contributed to literature review and writing the paper while AME supervised, designed, managed and supported the study.

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