

THE PALLIATIVE FILTER OPTION. FLEMISH PALLIATIVE CARE AND THE LEGALISATION OF EUTHANASIA IN BELGIUM

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In this paper we discuss the way organised palliative care can respond to political efforts to legalise euthanasia, taking the Belgian situation as our starting point. Unlike The Netherlands, Belgium was, at least until very recently, as far as euthanasia is concerned, a very ordinary country. Notwithstanding Belgium is now on the verge of becoming the second country in the world to have a euthanasia law. In these new circumstances the Federation Palliative Care Flanders wanted to react in a manner that was both as outspoken and as efficient as possible. The Federation tried to do this by starting a constructive dialogue with the politicians involved and by making public two elaborate statement papers (written by myself) regarding the relationship between palliative care and euthanasia. In these statement papers we drew attention to three very problematic presuppositions underpinning the Belgian (in fact most) proposals to legalise euthanasia, suggested some major amendments (i.a. the inclusion of a 'palliative filter') and urged the necessity of the further development of palliative care. This paper does not contain a plea for (or against) euthanasia or a plea for (or against) a euthanasia law. It offers an overview and analysis of the steps taken by the Flemish Palliative Care Federation by placing them in the perspective of both the contemporary Belgian situation and the broader ethical and international discussion.