

Both sides want policy on assisted suicide

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

They're still worlds apart philosophically on the so-called "Doctor Death" and the usual County prosecutor agree on one thing: Both want cap. it to address the issue of physician-assisted suicide as Michigan charts a course on dealing with it.

Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the retired Hoyal Oak pathologist, and Prosecutor (or) Richard Thompson this week both called for an objective analysis of physician-assisted suicide.

But that's as far as their agreement goes.

Kevorkian wants an objective analysis as a basis for establishing rules to regulate assisted suicides. Thompson wants knowledgeable physicians and lawyers to examine the issue as the basis for the state legislature to make it illegal.

Kevorkian called for a blue ribbon commission, to establish appropriate guidelines to regulate the right of people to decide their own destinies.

We must grasp this opportunity to resolve these issues or risk slipping again into the dark age of ignorance and intolerance.

KEVORKIAN MADE that request through a statement released Monday at a press conference called by

his lawyer, Geoffrey N. Fieger, in Southfield.

At the same conference, Fieger released video tapes of Sherry Miller and Marjorie Wanta, accompanied by Kevorkian and/or friends and relatives. The tapes make it abundantly clear that both women were knowledgeable and aware... and both wanted to die.

The tapes may be important because they clearly support Kevorkian's contention that both women, while not terminally ill, were in pain and wanted to end their lives.

They accomplished that end at the same time in a scenic setting in the Mt. Pleasant Recreation Area in Oakland Township on Oct. 23. Wanta, 58, who lived near Denton Harbor, administered a lethal dose of potassium chloride to herself, while Miller, 45, of Roseville, asphyxiated herself with carbon monoxide.

Both women sought — and obtained — advice from Kevorkian, who kicked off a nationwide debate on physician-assisted suicide in June 1990 by advising Janet Adkins, 54, on taking her own life with the machine he built. The deaths of Miller and Wanta have renewed that debate.

"IS THIS the beginning of an assembly line?" Prosecutor Thompson asked Monday in a separate press conference, referring to the 50 other people Kevorkian claims have con-

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— Dr. Kevorkian assisted suicide advocate

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— Prosecutor Thompson opposes assisted suicide

tacted him seeking information on assisted suicide.

"Are we to promote assisted suicide as an acceptable option for depressed teenagers?" he asked.

Obviously not, he said. But the legislature must act, by outlawing assisted suicide.

The prosecutor asked the legislature to make assisted suicide illegal in Michigan once before. That was last February, shortly after a district judge in Clarkston dismissed prosecution for helping Janet Adkins take her own life with his machine.

Thompson said he wouldn't appeal the judge's dismissal, although he still believed Kevorkian was guilty of murder.

But the proper forum for addressing assisted suicide was the legislature, he said. Let the people's elected representatives enact the appropriate laws.

And the appropriate laws, in Thompson's view, was to make assisted suicide illegal.

ALTHOUGH LEGISLATION to outlaw assisted suicide was introduced by State Sen. Frederick Dill

ingham, R-Powerville, it subsequently got bogged down in committee, according to the legislator's office.

That does not rule out the possibility of criminal charges against Kevorkian stemming from the deaths of Miller and Wanta last week, Thompson said Monday.

Neither inactivity by the legislature nor the dismissal of murder charges by a district judge will keep him from the course of action he considers appropriate, the prosecutor said.

Neither will "taunts or harangues from any lawyer," Thompson said,

referring to accusations, repeated by Kevorkian's attorney Monday, that the prosecutor was "persecuting" his client.

"He (Fieger) is conducting this like a three-ring circus," the prosecutor said. "Every day he has a press conference to unveil something new. I think this matter has to be resolved by medical and legal experts, not in the media."

As for his next step, Thompson said he would likely wait for the results of autopsy reports and toxicology examinations.

"That will take four to six weeks. Until then, all my options are open."

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