

# Good says assisted suicide referendum 'unlikely'

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

It's unlikely Michigan will have a referendum on assisted suicide, according to the head of the Hemlock Society.

The climate fostered by Dr. Jack Kevorkian — and his involvement in the assisted suicides of three women — is simply too emotional for objective assessment, said Janet Good, a Farmington Hills resident who is president of Michigan Hemlock.

The Hemlock Society doesn't dictate what issues Michigan voters may or may not decide at the polls.

But the concerns of the death with dignity organization would likely be a factor if — as urged by Kevorkian — advocates of legalizing assisted suicide begin circulating petitions to put the issue on the ballot, possibly in 1992.

As far as the Hemlock Society is concerned, the climate in Michigan is too volatile for careful deliberation or objective analysis of a ballot referendum, said Good.

She'd rather see her organization — whose ranks have swollen to about 900, including about 200 in Oakland County — work for thoughtful and meaningful action by the state Legislature.

SPECIFICALLY, GOOD wants the Hemlock Society, and its allies, to support two legislative proposals and oppose another. Her society favors proposals introduced by State Sen. David M. Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, and State Rep. Thomas G. Power, R-Traverse City.

The measures by Honigman, introduced in the Senate, and Power, proposed in the House, call for a blue ribbon panel — including medical,

legal and theological experts — to study the issue as a step toward adopting state policy.

The Hemlock Society, and like-minded people, should oppose the bill introduced by State Sen. Fred Dillingham, R-Powdermill. That would make assisted suicide a felony, with a four-year prison sentence for those convicted.

Dillingham's bill is being delayed in committee in the House, something Good applauds. "We support all efforts to keep that proposal locked up in committee," she said.

When, as she expects, the panel of experts is appointed to consider the state policy on assisted suicide, Good said she would like to see Oakland prosecutor Richard Thompson, an outspoken critic of assisted suicide, on it.

THEY DIFFER dramatically about assisted suicide, said Good. But Thompson, personally or

through a representative, would make a strong argument against assisted suicide.

"I'd want all views represented on that panel," said Good. "You can't formulate good public policy without them."

As far as a referendum on assisted suicide, "Not in Michigan," Good said. The national Hemlock Society would like to see referendums on assisted suicide in California next year and possibly in Florida and Oregon by 1994. But not in Michigan.

Kevorkian, a retired pathologist from Royal Oak, called for a statewide ballot issue on assisted suicide late last month, about a week after the Oct. 23 deaths of two of his patients.

Sherry Miller, 43, of Roseville, and Marjorie Wanz, 58, of Sodus near Benton Harbor, died in the presence of Kevorkian in a scenic, but isolated cabin in the Bald Mountain Recreation area in Oakland County.

Ironically those deaths — and Kevorkian's role — may have worked against a measure in the state of Washington that would have legalized assisted suicide, according to the head of the Hemlock chapter in Washington.

That referendum, the so-called Initiative 119 — was on the ballot in Washington Nov. 5 and lost by nearly 100,000 votes out of 1.3 million cast.

"I THINK THE defeat of Initiative 119 was directly linked to the actions of Dr. Kevorkian," said the Rev. Ralph M. Mero, a Unitarian minister and president of the Hemlock Society of Washington State. "Two weeks before the election, polls showed that 57 percent of the voters favored Initiative 119. On election day, only 47 percent voted for it."

Mero said he heard opponents

falsely say that if the ballot proposal were approved in Washington, Dr. Kevorkian would immediately move there and begin assisting suicides.

"They ignored the fact that Initiative 119 eliminated the necessity for Dr. Kevorkian," Mero said. "Regular physicians would have been able to help terminally ill patients."

Mero said he believes Kevorkian, rightly or wrongly, is associated with someone who "flouts the law" rather than working within its legitimate constraints.

In Michigan, the Hemlock Society has no direct link with Kevorkian, said president Janet Good, although they both favor legalizing assisted suicide.

"I know him personally and I respect his abilities and his compassion," said Good. "But we're working independently."

## Adoption service presents panel

Lutheran Adoption Service will present a program next week at the Holiday Inn at I-696 and the Lodge Freeway, Southfield.

Adoptive parents, birthparents and adoptees will talk about what they experienced when adopted youngsters searched out their birthparents, or birthparents searched out the youngsters they gave up.

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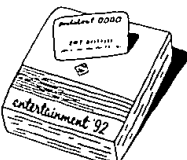
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