

# Hills woman urges support of 'mercy clinic'

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

Concerned that Dr. Jack Kevorkian's new "mercy clinic" may be closed by state officials or destroyed by vigilantes, the founder of the state's Hemlock chapter is calling on the medical profession to take the lead in making physician-assisted suicide accessible to those who need it.

"This should be the clarion call for the medical profession," Janet Good, a Farmington Hills resident who founded Hemlock of Michigan, said Tuesday as state and local officials grappled with the apparent suicide of Erika Garcellano.

"Doctors over the years have repeatedly told me they agree with what Dr. Kevorkian is doing (counseling them on suicide), but they don't like his methods," Good said Tuesday. "If physicians don't agree with the way he does it, they should come forward and do it the right way."

Garcellano, 60, of Kansas City, Mo., Monday became the 24th person in the past five years to take his or her own life after consulting with Kevorkian, a retired West Bloomfield pathologist who is internationally known because



Janet Good

of his advocacy of physician-assisted suicide.

Garcellano — who suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a better known as Lou Gehrig's disease — was found in a nondescript, frame building on Dixie Highway in Springfield Township.

The building, a one-time hardware store, had been vacant until Kevorkian leased it to establish what the physician's attorney, Geoffrey N. Fieger, described as

the Margo Janus Mercy clinic "for the purpose of alleviating the suffering of patients." Margo Janus was Kevorkian's sister and supporter who died last year.

Kevorkian has long advocated a series of centers where people with terminal illnesses or excruciating, untreatable pain could get medical attention and, at their choice, counseling on taking their own lives.

The Springfield Township facility was believed to be Kevorkian's attempt to establish the first of the envisioned mercy clinics.

The clinic could be "ideal for people who want the option of the ultimate freedom . . . taking their own lives," said Good, who founded Hemlock in 1989 with about 25 members.

"We now have 499, largely because of the controversy surrounding assisted suicide," said Good, who is Hemlock of Michigan's immediate past president as well as its chief spokesperson.

Like most good things, Kevorkian's fledgling clinic probably won't last long, said Good. If state officials don't find a way to shut the clinic down, its neighbors in Springfield Township will, she said.

"I think something will happen to that building very soon," Good said. On the basis of televised comments from people in the area of the clinic, Good said she detected hostility that could turn into violence.

Some of those interviewed said if they had been aware of what was happening in the building, Good said, "they would have taken care of it. Some of the threats weren't even veiled. Some religious people were making horrible threats."

Michigan Attorney General Frank J. Kelley seemed to raise the possibility of the state taking action to close Kevorkian's clinic in a radio interview Tuesday morning. Neither Kevorkian nor the Springfield Township facility has a license, Kelley said on the J.P. McCarthy show. "Nobody can operate without a license," he said.

Responding on the same program, Kevorkian's lawyer said no licenses were needed because no medical procedures were performed. Furthermore, "there is no law in Michigan against assisting in a suicide," said Fieger, a West Bloomfield resident who practices in Southfield.

# Medical society spokesman calls change unlikely

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

The attempt by Dr. Jack Kevorkian to establish a "mercy clinic" for people thinking about taking their own lives will not likely prompt the state's medical community to change its position on physician-assisted suicide, according to a spokesman for the Michigan State Medical Society.

"We have our policy, and it's been explained in great detail," said Dr. Peter A. Duhamel, a Rochester Hills general surgeon who is chairman of the board of the medical society.

Duhamel made his comments Tuesday, shortly after the body of Erika Garcellano, 60, was found in a frame building in Springfield Township leased to Kevorkian, the retired pathologist who is sometimes called "Doctor Death."

Garcellano is believed to be the 24th person to take his or her own life after consulting with the retired pathologist and is the first to do so in what Kevorkian's lawyer referred to as "the Margo Janus Mercy Clinic."

Duhamel reiterated a policy he said was adopted by the medical society after extensive discussion within its ranks . . . namely that assisted suicide is a private matter between physician and patient.

"We met in May," Duhamel said, "and the issue of physician-assisted suicide didn't even come up. That's a pretty good indication the society isn't going to change its position."

Garcellano suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. While it is debilitating and incurable, the nature of the disease

prompted Duhamel to raise a basic issue.

"I'm not a neurologist," he said, "but to my knowledge, people with Lou Gehrig's disease are not particularly beset with pain." Victims are disabled and lose body control, he said, but they don't usually experience excruciating pain.

The problem, the physician said, is essentially emotional and psychological, because the victims are mentally alert, know the

disease is incurable and that nothing can be done. Victims know they will be dependent on other people, he said.

"From what I know about Mrs. Garcellano, she was alert, but she had no particular complaints about pain, although other people had to do things for her," Duhamel said. "I don't know that's a reason to end somebody's life, and it's not an overwhelming case for mercy killing."

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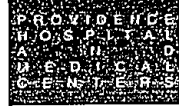
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