Euthanasia is a topic of hot debate in social, political, legal, medical, religious, and ethical arenas. It is one of those topics that collection development librarians grapple with when striving to create authoritative, accessible, and useful collections. What are the best books, what journals are needed, and just what issues make up the debate? Kelly Myer Polacek has addressed the topic from a huge range of perspectives, keeping in mind both academic and public library needs. Her article supplies librarians with a critical understanding of the cases key to the current debate; a wealth of foundational articles, critical texts, and core journals important in shaping a reliable collection; and a framework for reference librarians to use when assisting researchers. Polacek obtained an MLS degree (with an emphasis in science librarianship) from Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science in December 2006. She also holds a master's degree in the biological sciences, with an emphasis in science education and physiology. Polacek and her dog, Fran, are registered Pet Partners with the Delta Society.—Editor

Derived from the Greek terms eu meaning good, and thanos meaning death, euthanasia is the act of bringing death to another person in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. Although euthanasia has historically been common practice in many societies, it remains one of the most controversial topics today. In 2005, Jack Kevorkian, also known as “Dr. Death,” was denied parole for his involvement in the assisted death of Thomas Youk. Terry Schiavo’s death, perhaps the most famous of 2005, was precluded by the unprecedented involvement of her family, the media, and the federal government. These recent events renewed public and professional interest in euthanasia, resulting in hundreds of publications on the topic.

This flurry of publications contributed to the thousands of journal articles, books, magazine and newspaper articles, and Web sites already available. Although much of this material is of unknown authority, valuable information indeed exists within professional, medical, and legal literature, as well as materials from advocacy groups, health resources, and government publications. This guide collects those resources and fills a gap currently existing among collection development and evaluation tools. It is unique in its breadth of coverage, including biased and unbiased Web sites, databases, and scholarly and popular writings, which discuss the legal, ethical, philosophical, medical, historical, national, international, and practical issues surrounding the topic of euthanasia. It is a timely and comprehensive portal for a range of libraries and researcher needs.
Libraries with limited budgets can simply add the books listed here, and in doing so, meet the information needs of their users. The diverse perspectives of the materials listed in the guide can be considered by academic libraries with larger scopes and budgets and will supplement existing collections and fill any gaps in coverage. Public libraries can create a multiauthor, multiperspective collection with as little as two or three books by considering the selection of Greenhaven Press publications and works from famous cases listed below. This guide could also serve as a collection development tool for health science and medical libraries. Health practitioners will appreciate the currency of information available in the Internet sources and periodicals suggested, while the search strategies for databases make excellent starting points for academics and other researchers. Finally, even though assisted suicide is legal only in the State of Oregon, there are many methods, such as living wills and power-of-attorney, used to declare varying end-of-life intents. Those needing clarification on the legality of these documents will also find practical information in this guide. The author thanks Lokman Meho and Douglas R. Brewster for help in the preparation of this manuscript.

WEB RESOURCES

Medical Web Resources


A comprehensive Web site with information for consumers, patients, physicians, nurses, and educators. An excellent starting point to learn about terminal diseases and conditions that might precipitate consideration of euthanasia. Useful search terms: euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, end-of-life.


Provides consumer-oriented information from the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, and other government agencies and health-related organizations. Effective search terms are “end of life” and “living will.” Results of these searches provide links to internal and authoritative external sites related to: advanced directives, bereavement, cancer, hospice care, caregivers, and assisted living.


Health On the Net (HON) Foundation is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to helping laypersons and medical professionals find reliable sources of health care information on the Internet. Only sites abiding by HON's honor code are retrieved during a search. Use keyword: euthanasia.

Organizations and Associations


This national organization is dedicated to the protection of innocent human life. Although known primarily for its desire to prohibit abortion, it is also involved in other life issues such as living wills and euthanasia.


Addresses the issues of euthanasia, assisted suicide, advance directives, and pain control. Promotes the right of patients to receive medical care and compassion rather than physicians' rights to engage in euthanasia. Particularly useful for users seeking legal information.


The Hemlock Society began in 1980 when the wife of founder Derek Humphry took her own life with the help of her husband. The site contains information about and links to sites describing its members' efforts to change laws and policy.

BOOKS AND AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL


Battin has been a contributor to the field of bioethics, particularly on the topics of suicide and euthanasia, for more than thirty years. This collection of her works includes historical and cross-cultural essays, systematic pieces as well as fiction and creative nonfiction. Includes bibliography and index. Also consider her 1994 publication, The Least Worst Death (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr.)


This publication is unique in its discussion of the chemical and pharmacological properties of drugs used to end life and the physiological consequences of successful and unsuccessful euthanazations.


A historical account of euthanasia in the United States during the last century. Dowbiggin traces the decades, providing accounts of the significant events of the euthanasia movement. Unlike the other materials in this bibliography, it includes a significant emphasis on eugenics and its role within the euthanasia movement.


Three philosophers debate the ethics and legality of euthanasia, the limitations of medicine, neglect of the dying, the Christian view against euthanasia, and the suicide “slippery slope.”

Using examples from mainstream publications, Gailey argues that the media has focused on the medical and legal aspects of euthanasia and ignored ethical and religious concerns, thereby promoting pro-euthanasia views and ignoring pro-life perspectives. This discussion of euthanasia from the perspective of media involvement makes this text a unique resource.


These books contain collections of essays on issues related to euthanasia. The essays are written by different authors and placed adjacent to each other for easy comparison. Academics and professionals will appreciate that the essays are written by experts in the field. Although described as series for young adults, these books are useful for any reader new to the subject. Available in print or online via a subscription database.


A veritable guide to choosing and completing the act of euthanasia. Humphry's guidance includes information about starvation, drugs and dosages, hospice options, a final checklist, life insurance, durable power of attorney, and living wills, among many others.


In *Final Exit,* Humphry instructs readers how to commit suicide. In *The Good Euthanasia Guide,* he lists contact information of right-to-die groups and describes ways in which an individual can seek (illegal) assistance in dying. He also discusses the taboo subject of euthanasia for the untreated mentally ill.


This book addresses the roles of patients, families, and mental health practitioners in end-of-life issues. From his perspective as a clinical psychologist, he discusses issues such as: communication between health care providers and patients; prolonging life, passive euthanasia, voluntary euthanasia, and assisted suicide; end-of-life care options; informed consent; problems with Medicare; and other legal and ethical concerns. Useful for undergraduates and higher as a general text or reference source.


This series of DVDs documents recent, ethically laden court cases. Of the five DVDs, three specifically address end-of-life issues. The following key Modern Ethics cases are included in this series: (1) "Michigan v. Anderson: A Right to Life or Death" 1-930545-77-0; (2) "In Re Michael Martin: A Battle over Life Support," ISBN: 1-930545-81-9; and (3) "Michigan v. Kevorkian: The Ethics of Assisted Suicide, ISBN: 1-930545-78-9. Documents contain some actual testimony, interviews with attorneys, and stories from the persons involved. Each DVD is a complete documentary. From their homepage, Choices offers a free, three-page guidebook for instructional use, making these DVDs appropriate for high school and college students, as well as adults.


This book describes the extralegal practice of assisted suicide and euthanasia by health care professionals, primarily among AIDS patients in San Francisco, although some accounts are from Australia. Despite the limitations of scope, the perspectives on euthanasia provided by this book make it an excellent addition to a medical library.


Quill, a professor of medicine and psychiatry, relates several personal stories about euthanasia as well as the roles and limitations of the Hippocratic Oath, aggressive medical treatment, limitations of comfort care, and advance directives. The book includes an example of a living will and health care proxy, as well as explanations of how they are used.


This multiauthored book is a collection of essays defending physician-assisted suicide as one of several options available for those making end-of-life choices. Author contributions include perspectives on mercy; commentary on legally
practiced euthanasia; euthanasia and the law, particularly in Oregon and the Netherlands; and, political, philosophical, and religious issues surrounding the euthanasia controversy.

REFERENCES SOURCES


By presenting them opposite each other, Brock clarifies many issues related to euthanasia such as: competence versus incompetence; ordinary versus extraordinary care; killing versus allowing to die; not starting treatment versus stopping treatment. He also explains different types of end-of-life care. Includes cross references and bibliography.


A brief discussion of euthanasia in the contexts of Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Supreme Court. Includes references to specific Bible verses to justify various interpretations. Includes cross references and bibliography.


This extensive article includes definitions of euthanasia and associated terms, detailed reviews of both passive and active euthanasia, and arguments for and against the permisibility of euthanasia. Includes cross references, bibliography, and its own glossary.


This encyclopedia has more than twenty terms in its index related to euthanasia. It includes a bibliography, cross references, index, and an extensive list of national associations, institutions, organizations, and government agencies.


Article addresses euthanasia from three perspectives: a liberal point of view, a conservative point of view, and an altruistic point of view. Includes cross references and bibliography.


Author describes euthanasia and its role through history, from Greco-Roman societies through present day. Addresses euthanasia in the historical contexts of Christianity and law. Significant component of article describes euthanasia as a part of medical practice before 1870, 1870–1945, and 1945–1960s. Includes ninety internal and external references, and bibliography.


Distinguishes between four types of euthanasia: passive, active, involuntary, and physician-assisted suicide. Briefly addresses historical and legal considerations. Includes sidebar focusing on physician-assisted suicide. Contains cross references and suggestions for further reading.

JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES

Unless otherwise noted, these titles are peer-reviewed and indexed in Medline.

Journals focused on euthanasia and suicide


Issues in Law and Medicine. Terre Haute, Ind.: National Legal Center for the Medically Dependent and Disabled, 1985–. Three issues per year (ISSN: 8756-8160).


Journals in which the most highly cited articles on euthanasia can be found:


SUBSCRIPTION DATABASES

Ovid MEDLINE, Ovid Technologies; PubMed, U.S. National Library of Medicine

Both of these portals access MEDLINE’s database, which contains thousands of articles dating back to 1966. For successful searching, use the following MeSH terms: euthanasia; euthanasia, active; euthanasia, active, voluntary; euthanasia, passive; suicide, assisted. Limit results to humans to remove veterinary-related publications. While Ovid MEDLINE requires a password, PubMed is freely accessible to the public. PubMed includes links to some free articles as well as full-text articles available for purchase. Searching can also be limited to the Bioethics topic subset.

Web of Science, The Thomson Corporation

An outstanding database that allows for searching cited references. For successful searching, truncate and wildcard keywords such as: euthanasia, assisted suicide; limit results to humans; and perform cited reference searches on primary contributors to the field—including authors mentioned in this column.

Ovid HealthSTAR, Ovid Technologies

This database (a continuation of the National Library of Medicine’s defunct HealthSTAR database) indexes articles focusing on the clinical and nonclinical aspects of health care. Its collection of journal articles, abstracts, and government documents dates from 1975. Subjects typically indexed include: applied health science, medicine, and nursing, among others. For successful searching, use the following MeSH terms: euthanasia; euthanasia, active; euthanasia, active, voluntary; euthanasia, passive; suicide, assisted.

Lexis-Nexis Academic, Reed Elsevier

Lexis-Nexis Academic provides full-text newspaper articles, magazines, and legal documents from national and international sources. Effective search terms include: euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Academic Search Premier, EBSCO

This general knowledge, multidisciplinary database contains more than two thousand scholarly and popular writings on euthanasia. Subject terms: euthanasia (including option to explode); euthanasia, law and legislation; euthanasia, social aspects. Keyword “euthanasia” may also be used.

INFLUENTIAL AUTHORS AND ARTICLES


Michigan physicians’ and residents’ opinions on the legalization of euthanasia. Cited more than 160 times.

FAMOUS PEOPLE AND FAMOUS CASES

Nancy Cruzan

In 1983, 25-year-old Nancy Cruzan lost control of her vehicle, was thrown from her car into a water-filled ditch, and was without oxygen for approximately fifteen minutes. She never recovered from the brain damage this caused and remained in a persistent vegetative state. Seven years and several court cases later, her parents were granted the right to remove her feeding tube, allowing her to die.


Derek Humphry, Jean Humphry, and Ann Wickett Humphry

In 1975, Derek Humphry founded the Hemlock Society. When his first wife, Jean, became terminally ill with cancer, he helped her take her own life. Derek's second wife, Ann, helped him write an account of this event (Jean's Way). Later, Ann committed suicide. Resources listed here include materials about or by any of the three individuals.


Jack Kevorkian

Perhaps the most famous contemporary associated with euthanasia, Kevorkian has been a proponent of euthanasia for most of his career. He has assisted in the death of one hundred or more individuals, some of whose competencies are still debated. Also known as Dr. Death, he is currently in prison for assisting in some of those deaths.


Karen Ann Quinlan

In 1975, Quinlan suffered irreversible brain damage when she lost consciousness at a party after consuming alcohol and valium. The New Jersey Supreme Court eventually granted her parents the right to remove her life support. Unexpectedly, Quinlan continued to live in a vegetative state for nine years until she died of pneumonia.


Theresa Marie (Terri) Schiavo

In 1990, 26-year-old Terri Schiavo collapsed in her apartment from the consequences of an alleged eating disorder. She remained in a coma for ten weeks and was eventually declared to be in a persistent vegetative state. In 1998, her husband petitioned to remove her life support. Seven years and numerous legal battles later, she died shortly after the third and final removal of her gastric tube.

Euthanasia: A Guide to Sources

109-3. Also available at http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS62625


LEgISLAtIon And LEgAL RESoURCES


Includes text of state and national documents (for example, state referenda and executive orders) with explanations of how these laws affect individuals and a discussion of the consequences of possible future legislation.


Chapter thirty-seven discusses right-to-die issues including durable powers of attorney, euthanasia, and living wills.


An updating loose-leaf with the latest legal information on advance directives, powers of attorney, civil and criminal liability for participating in passive or active euthanasia, and other information.

THOMAS: Legislative Information from the Library of Congress. The Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act of 1997, the Pain Relief Promotion Act of 1999, variants of these two acts, and other legislative documents are available online in full-text at http://thomas.loc.gov.

For each bill, a summary, congressional references, and a current status are available. For best results, search all available sessions of Congress and use ordered proximity search “#1(assisted suicide).”

END-OF-LIFE dIRECtIvES

How To’s, Forms, and Do-It-Yourself


LegalDocs® Legal Documents Online. Click on “Wills and Trusts” to prepare free living wills, and durable health care powers of attorney at cost. Enter requested information, and printable document is created automatically; print for your records. www.legaldocs.com.