

Joint Declaration

15 August 2009

In response to the media coverage of Dr Philip Nitschke's visit to Hong Kong, we make the following declaration:

We object the promotion of suicide, and do not support euthanasia in Hong Kong

We support rational discussions on euthanasia in the community, so people could understand issues of human suffering as well as the importance of good and adequate end-of-life care. However, Dr Nitschke is promoting more than "euthanasia" or "physician assisted suicide" for the terminally ill patients. In other parts of the world, he is promoting to the public various ways to commit suicide, including how to use a bag to suffocate oneself, and how to buy lethal drugs from Mexico. Although we respect an individual's autonomy, it is unethical to promote suicide to the public. As an expression of our objection, we do not participate in dialogue with him.

We object the promotion of suicide, and we do not support the practice of euthanasia in Hong Kong. Here, euthanasia means the direct intentional killing of the patient as part of the medical care being offered. The gravity of euthanasia far exceeds that of an individual choice. The far-reaching societal consequences of legalizing euthanasia, including the social issues induced, the impact on societal values, the negative implication on the chronically ill and the vulnerable groups, and the possibility of going down the slippery slope should be taken seriously.

Requesting euthanasia or a wish to hasten death as expressed by patient is more often a quest for attention to and relief of pain and suffering. In many modern societies, various healthcare services, including palliative/hospice services, are being provided to relieve the pain and suffering of the patients. We are aware that in Hong Kong, palliative or hospice services have not covered all terminally ill patients. But this should not be an excuse to promote euthanasia. In Hong Kong, we would like to see the public and the Government to put emphasis on strengthening the existing palliative care services to help these needy

patients, instead of promoting euthanasia.

We are concerned about the right of the patients and their dignity. We agree that, in medical treatment decisions, the patient has the right to refuse futile life-sustaining treatment. However, the public should be clear that refusal of futile life-sustaining treatment implies the acceptance of the fact that human is mortal. This is ethically and legally distinct from euthanasia, is legally acceptable in most parts of the world including Hong Kong, and should not be confused with euthanasia.

Supporting Organizations :

Society for the Promotion of Hospice Care Society for Life & Death Education

Hong Kong Society of Palliative Medicine Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society

Hong Kong Hospice Nurses' Association Comfort Concern Care Group

Direction Association for the Handicapped Hong Kong Cancer Fund

Hong Kong Rheumatoid Arthritis Association

Self-Help Group for the Brain Damaged

**Hong Kong Jockey Club, Centre for Suicide Research & Prevention,
The University of Hong Kong**

Centre on Behavioral Health, The University of Hong Kong