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Rights of elderly patients at the end of life: The French experience

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The management of terminally ill patients has been improved by the accessibility of palliative care since 1999 in France. The relatives or loved ones were therefore allowed to assist the dying patient until the end. The Kouchner law adopted in 2002 has established the informed consent process but the most important regulation is the Leonetti law. The law of 2005 concerning the rights of patients at the end of life permits with-holding and withdrawing of treatment for patient at the terminal phase with some limitations such as few highly publicized individual situations. During the past 5 years, the debate about legalization of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide came up to public through media in France. Several national institutions expressed their opinions and official assessments of the Leonetti law revealed a misunderstanding of its spirit among healthcare providers. French population was also unfamiliar of this law published almost 10 years ago. According to the recent Parliament reports, the legislator plans to strengthen this law and then advance directives will become binding in France. This project raises several ethical issues among healthcare providers, such as burnout, especially for those who working in palliative care setting, hospice and long term care department. As it is well recognized, the culture of palliative care is not rather implemented in France, death is still a society's final taboo and continuing medical education has an important role in extending palliative care in order to improve quality care at the end of life for elderly.

Biography

Jean Paul Rwabihama is a Medical Doctor in internal medicine from University of Rwanda and Specialist in Geriatrics after 5 years of training in Paris. He received Master of Science in Eleventh Law at Paris 7 University and completed his PhD in HICS and Public Health at the Het Toulouse University (France). He was a PhD fellow at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics of Georgetown University (USA). Currently, he is a Senior Consultant in Geriatrics at Paris Public Hospital (APHP) and Researcher at the Clinical Epidemiology and Ageing Unit, at University of ParisEst Creteil.

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