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NETHERLANDS DISPATCHES

MOBILE EUTHANASIA

UNITS

by

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The mobile euthanasia units launched in the Netherlands Thursday may not much resemble Dr. Kevorkian's death van, but they stirred up nearly as much controversy.

The program allows teams of doctors and nurses to visit very sick patients whose primary care physicians have refused end their lives, the Guardian reported. The Netherlands was the first country to legalize euthanasia in 2002.

The program, called Levenseinde, meaning "Life End," was initiated by the world's largest euthanasia organization, with 130,000 members, based in the Netherlands. The mobile program is free to Dutch citizens.

Program rules say that sick people or their relatives may apply for a mobile unit visit, by phone or email. Patients must be suffering tremendous pain and be able to articulate several times that they want to die.

The team would also interview the primary care physician who would not end their patient's life.

"They will first give the patient an injection, which will put them into a deep sleep, then a second injection follows, which will stop their breathing and heart beat," said Walburg De Jong, an advocate of assisted suicide, according to the Guardian.

The teams would be allowed one procedure a week because of the emotional toll that each visit takes.

In the Netherlands, each euthanasia case is reported to a commission, made up of a doctor, legal and ethics specialists to make sure the criteria have been followed.

Controversy arose when the members of the Royal Dutch Society of Doctors said they doubt the doctors would be able to form a strong enough bond with patients to properly assess a case, the Agence France-Presse reported.

Currently, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Oregon, Washington and Montana are the only jurisdictions where laws allow assisted suicide, according to the Patients Rights Council.

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