



Anti-abortion protest

Anti-abortion protesters_Richard Ellis / Alamy Stock Photo

The Dignity in Dying movement, although a totally separate organisation, is strongly supported by the British Humanist Association (BHA). In its vision statement, Dignity in Dying, clearly sets out its beliefs and its purpose. It states:

We believe that everyone has the right to a dignified death. This means:

- **Choice** over where we die, who is present and our treatment options.
- **Access** to expert information on our options, good quality end-of-life care, and support for loved ones and carers.
- **Control** over how we die, our symptoms and pain relief, and planning our own death.

<http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/about-us/>

The BHA supports the Dignity in Dying movement as Humanists believe that people should be able to exercise **personal autonomy**, that is, the right, as an individual person, to be able to choose to die if they are suffering.

Much of the support for the Dignity in Dying campaign does come from non-religious people, and much of the opposition to it is religious. This said, it is also really important to acknowledge that there are in fact, many deeply religious people who strongly support the campaign give terminally ill people the right to choose medically assisted dying. In fact, there is even an organisation, called **Inter-Faith Leaders for Dignity in Dying (IFDiD)**, who avidly support the Dignity in Dying Campaign.

In 2013, IFDiD commissioned a YouGov poll which found that 62% of people who identified as belonging to a religion supported the legalisation of assisted dying for terminally ill adults with mental capacity, whether they would want the choice for themselves or not. Only 18% were opposed.

So, we are studying Dignity in Dying as part of the non-religious perspectives on Issues of Life and Death because the aims of Dignity in Dying are widely supported by Humanists and other non-religious people. We would be wrong, however, to see Dignity in Dying as a purely non-religious, or Humanist movement. As you are learning, there is lots of diversity of opinion among religious believers and those without religious faith, and the very controversial issues of euthanasia and assisted dying are no exception!

Many (but not all) Humanists, and others who do not believe in God, believe that a dying person should have the right to choose if they want end their life, to prevent further suffering. If a person does not believe in God, they also do not believe that they should have to wait until God decides it is time for them to die. It is their right; they would argue to choose for themselves whether they want to go on living with a painful terminal illness.

The choice of a medically assisted death is not available in the UK, but there are certain states in the USA, and some countries in Europe where, under certain circumstances it is legal - notably Switzerland, where many UK residents have travelled to end their lives at the controversial Dignitas clinic where a person does have this choice. The Dignity in Dying Movement aims to make medically assisted death an option for people living here in the UK, with strict legal safeguards in place to protect vulnerable people.

Use the digital resource DIGNITY IN DYING DISCUSSION POINTS to consider how a Humanist would respond to arguments against euthanasia.

EXTENSION

Think about the religious perspectives you are studying. Can you think of replies to these arguments against euthanasia from a religious point of view?

DISCUSSION POINT

If religious people really believe that only God should decide when a person dies, then surely medical intervention is interfering with God's plan!

Discuss this statement as a group or in pairs.
Write your thoughts in the speech and thought bubbles below.



Speech bubble

Speech bubble; Rawpixel Ltd/gettyimages