

New movie sparks debate about death

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Life-enhancing?: Tilda Swinton, Pedro Almodóvar and Julianne Moore (left to right, above) celebrating the new film *The Room Next Door* at the Venice Film Festival this week.

Should euthanasia be a human right? A sensational new film makes a quiet argument for universal assisted dying. But some believe that allowing euthanasia places us on a slippery slope towards legal murder.

What's happening?

The Venice Film Festival was in full swing and the city hummed with life. But the issue on everyone's mind was death. *The Room Next Door*, the new film by celebrated Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, has poured fuel on a burning question: whether people should be allowed to end their lives via **euthanasia**.

The film is about a **terminally ill** woman who asks an old friend to help her to die, and critics have marvelled at its quiet beauty. But the debate it ignites is more controversial.

Find out more

Euthanasia is currently legal in 10 countries, but illegal almost everywhere else. In the UK, a doctor can face 14 years in prison for helping someone to die.

Supporters believe that those who face extreme pain should be able to end their suffering, to face death with dignity.

A majority in the UK agrees. A 2023 **Ipsos** poll found that 65% of respondents think assisted dying should be legal, with only 17% sure it should not be.

Yet not everyone is on board.

Critics argue that euthanasia opens up many ethical issues. Doctors in many countries currently swear a dedication, based on the **Hippocratic Oath**. This often asks them to respect human life and cause no harm to their patients.

Asking doctors to help people die could work against this. Doctors are not qualified to know whether people should die. And patients can recover suddenly.

Legal euthanasia also raises the possibility that vulnerable people could be forced into ending their lives. It could be a slippery slope towards legal murder.

Should euthanasia be a human right?

Some say

Yes! It is ridiculous that a country can force people to stay alive against their wishes. The freedom to die is just as important to our dignity as humans as our freedom of speech and expression.

Others think

No! Not all societies are equipped to assess patients fairly or to offer painless deaths.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

"It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live."

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you ever think about your death? How does it make you feel?

Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180), Roman emperor and philosopher

What do you think?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: In which countries is suicide a crime and where is assisted suicide legal?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Find one thing we know for certain and another thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are a doctor in a country with legal euthanasia. What would you do if you were asked to help a terminally ill patient to die?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, come up with the idea for a film that tackles a major social issue.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Euthanasia has been legalised. Create an advertisement for your own euthanasia clinic.

Glossary

Euthanasia - The deliberate and painless ending of a life.

Terminally ill - Suffering from an incurable illness.

Ipsos - Ipsos provides election research and forecasting services to help stakeholders navigate these events.

Hippocratic Oath - An ancient Greek ethical code for doctors still used by many medics today. In his new oath, Dr Jordan Shlain focuses on patient data and making medical language more accessible.