

Medical ethics journal lays out case for ‘organ donation euthanasia’

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UNITED KINGDOM, September 8, 2016 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — A medical consultant and university bioethicist argued in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* for the acceptance of euthanasia so that patients’ organs can be harvested.

Describing scenarios in which a permanently injured person’s organs could be used to save a relative’s life, [Dr. Zoe B. Fritz of Warwick University’s Division of Health Sciences argued](#) euthanizing the injured person, resulting in the availability of his or her vital organs, could be in his or her best interests.

Instead of simply killing a person in a “vegetative state” by denying him or her food and water, it might be in the person’s best interest to actively euthanize him or her with lethal drugs, Fritz suggested. Fritz noted that a patient might not want hundreds of thousands of dollars to be spent giving him or her hydration and nutrition.

Killing a patient by dehydration and starvation can result in severely damaged organs. Fritz wrote that if an unconscious, seriously injured person was known for being selfless and caring about her family, it could be argued that maintaining the welfare of her family is in her best interests — even if that means she will be euthanized so that her liver can be given to a needy son.

“The status quo — of allowing withdrawal of [food and water] with the inevitable consequence of death, while forbidding actively ending life with a drug that would stop the heart — is an ethical fudge, following the law, rather than making it,” Fritz said.

“Allowing [a seriously injured, unconscious] mother to donate her liver to her son would be acting in her best interests; at a point where she herself has nothing to gain from her organ, why would we prevent the donation of it to the son she was trying to save?” the ethicist wrote.

“We currently defend a total ban on euthanasia even when using it might minimize suffering for the individual (swift death as opposed to potential suffering from withdrawal of [food and water]) and for those in need of organs,” Fritz continued. “The strongest argument against legalizing euthanasia in this circumstance is that, by making it an absolute — it is never right to willfully end a life — we are protecting society both from a ‘slippery slope’ of euthanasia in less regulated situations and an erosion of its moral framework. But this is a position that is upheld by fear, and which tolerates the suffering of a real (very) few because of concerns about some other (hypothetical) few and a possible societal shift towards tolerating euthanasia more generally.”

In applying a utilitarian argument to the question of whether it is ethical to euthanize a person for his or her organs, “to skip the step of working out what the individual would have wanted, to ignore the possibility of considering their autonomy even when they lack capacity would be to reduce them to a body with organs rather than respecting them as a human,” Fritz wrote.

“In the circumstance of a patient in PVS [a “persistent vegetative state”] who has been through the court of protection, where it has been agreed that [denial of food and water] is not in their best interests, it should be morally and legally permissible — or even mandated — to explore what is in their best interests in the wider sense, what their wishes were in terms of organ donation and what means of dying they would prefer,” Fritz said. “If the conclusion from this consideration — in the courts, with appropriate safeguarding — is that they would wish their life to be actively ended facilitating the donation of their organs, then this should be respected.”

In the Netherlands and Belgium, where euthanasia laws are some of the most liberal in the world, [more than 40 patients](#) have already had their organs harvested after being euthanatized.