

## Strict Guidelines

The words "Dutch euthanasia" and "strict guidelines" have made a perfect foursome in the British media for a long time, despite all evidence from Dutch doctors. They were never seen apart. However a recent TV programme in Holland and a Lancet report on 19.4.03, seems to have unhitched them.

Officially, 54 per cent of euthanasia cases are reported as such by the doctors concerned. A new law supposed to encourage reporting came into effect on April 2002. However doctors still feel that reporting formalities are "too much fuss". Before the broadcast, when details had appeared in the press, the Royal Dutch Medical Association condemned the alleged misuse of "terminal sedation". "Supporters of the Dutch euthanasia policy hope the Reporter documentary will not be distributed to foreign television stations," wrote Frank van Kolschooten in The Lancet.

Earlier in the year in the U.S.A. "Breakpoint with Charles Colson (13 Jan. 03) reported: "Grandpa Reitsema was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma And while his lymphoma was terminal, he was expected to live for a few more years. And he would have, if his nursing home had been located someplace other than Holland."

The first hint that something was amiss came when one of his daughters tried to give him some water. A nurse entered the room and said "Don't give him water." When the daughter asked why not, the nurse replied, 'You're not allowed to give him anything to drink.'

What the Reitsemas didn't know was that their grandfather's doctor had, as Jonathan Finbody of the Christian Medical and Dental Society put it, "aimed to kill" Grandpa. Without consulting his patient or the family, the doctor had "quietly ordered nurses to administer overdoses of morphine while withholding food and water." By the time the Reitsemas understood what was going on, it was too late. Grandpa died the day after his daughter's run-in with the nurse."

The Reitsemas' further enquiries led them to estimate that seventy-five percent of the time a Dutch doctor acts to hasten a patient's death, he acts without the patient's permission.