

'Dr. Death' Jack Kevorkian Dies at 83

✖ Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the medical pathologist known for his lifelong efforts to legalize physician-assisted suicide, died Friday of complications from a kidney-related illness in a Detroit-area hospital. He was 83.

Known as "Dr. Death," Kevorkian spent decades fighting for euthanasia to be legal. He served eight years of his original 10-25 year sentence in prison for murder, and was arrested multiple times for helping kill 130 patients commit suicide between 1990 and 1999. Kevorkian used injections, carbon monoxide and the infamous suicide machine he built from scraps for \$30 to aid in the death of patients with terminal conditions such as ALS, malignant brain tumors and multiple sclerosis.

When asked by CNN's Anderson Cooper in a 2010 interview how it felt to take a life, he explained: "I didn't do it to end a life. I did it to end the suffering the patient's going through. The patient's obviously suffering, what's a doctor supposed to do, turn his back?"

"Many of the victims on whom Jack Kevorkian preyed were people with disabilities who had no terminal illness; one was simply old. In at least five cases autopsies were unable to confirm any disease at all," observed Burke J. Balch, J.D., director of National Right to Life's Robert Powell Center for Medical Ethics.

Most believe his practices to be too radical, but the controversial doctor did have some supporters. However, his critics and supporters typically agree on one thing: Due to his advocacy for the terminally ill's right to choose how they die, "hospice care has boomed in the U.S., and physicians have

become more sympathetic to patients' pain and more willing to prescribe medication to relieve it," *The New York Times* reports.

Kevorkian believed dying should be a an intimate and dignified process, and said this was something most terminally ill patients are denied.

In March 1996, a California United States Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that mentally competent, terminally ill adults have a constitutional right to die with the help of medical experts and family members. The first federal endorsement of its kind, this was a large achievement for Kavorkian.

Oregon, in 1997, became the first state to make it legal for physicians to prescribe lethal medications to assist terminally ill patients in ending their lives.

The only other states that have legalized physician-assisted suicide are Washington and Montana. Although he did not largely impact the U.S. legal system, he was influential in raising public awareness about euthanasia and the suffering of the terminally ill.

After winning multiple trials, Kevorkian was convicted of second-degree murder on March 26, 1999. The trial was held six months after he videotaped himself injecting Thomas Youk, a patient suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease) with the drugs that caused Youk's death. The tape was aired on "60 Minutes" in November of 1998.

"You had the audacity to go on national television, show the world what you did and dare the legal system to stop you," said District Judge Jessica R. Cooper, who presided over the trial. "Well, sir, consider yourself stopped."

Kevorkian was released from prison on parole in June 2007 after promising authorities he would not assist any more suicides.

Dr. Kevorkian has garnered a lot of national attention, from newspapers to television, and his story was even turned into a movie in 2010. Al Pacino, who played "Dr. Death" in HBO's *You Don't Know Jack*, said he was gratified to "try to portray someone as brilliant and interesting and unique" as Dr. Kevorkian and that it had been a "pleasure to know him" in his Emmy acceptance speech.