



Editorial

Dr. Hon. Lo Wing Lok, our legislator representing the medical functional constituency, put forward a motion debate on “the care for the terminally ill” in the Legislative Council on 2nd May, 2001. His speech and his motion are reprinted in this issue of the Newsletter. In brief, he talked about his position against euthanasia, his support towards palliative care and towards forgoing futile life sustaining treatment. He suggested legislation for advance directive and to establish a regulatory mechanism on the care of the dying. The motion was finally turned down by a narrow margin. However, independent of the outcome of the voting, the debate had great significance on its own.

1. By putting forward the motion, Dr. Lo signified to the public the importance of the care for the terminally ill, and the importance of open discussion of the difficult ethical issues involved.
2. By his clear explanation of the terminologies and his elaboration on the reasons behind his views, his speech served as an important educational talk to the public.
3. His open support towards palliative care provided a positive force to help our promotion of palliative care in Hong Kong. He also boosted our morale.
4. From the speeches of the other legislators and our Secretary for Health and Welfare, we could appreciate their understanding of the ethical issues, their concern towards the dying, and their support towards palliative care and death education.
5. In previous debates in the public media on the issue, there was much confusion in the terminologies used, making the debates confusing and ineffective. It should be

applauded that in this debate in our Legislative Council, all the terminologies were elaborated by the speakers clearly without the slightest confusion throughout the discussion. This served as a good example that public discussion with proper terminology, on the difficult ethical issues was indeed possible.

The defeat of the motion had nothing to do with the lack of interest or concern on the issue. There were good reasons why some legislators voted against the motion. There was worry that accepting the motion would give the public a wrong impression that the Government should consider legalising euthanasia. One legislator pointed out that the existing self regulation by the profession on the care of the terminally ill is adequate, and there is no need for the Government to establish another regulatory mechanism. It is comforting to hear such confidence towards the profession, and we should not let ourselves down.

This motion debate was an important milestone in the public discussion on the care of the dying in Hong Kong. We look forward to other sensible debates in the future, which not only would clarify the views of the Hong Kong community on the issue, but would also educate the public on this. We hope that, with proper understanding about death, dying would no longer be alienated. Death would still be accepted as a normal part of our life and as a natural event. With this, we would have more respect towards our own life and towards other people’s life. Such respect is badly needed in this modern society.