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Catholic care home in Belgium fined for refusing euthanasia

by Simon Caldwell posted Monday, 4 Jul 2016



An activist holds a medical kit which can be used for euthanasia (PA)

St Augustine rest home was fined €6,000 after it stopped doctors from giving a lethal injection to a 74-year-old woman

Judges in Belgium have fined a Catholic nursing home for refusing to allow the euthanasia of a lung cancer sufferer on its premises.

The St Augustine rest home in Diest was ordered to pay a total of €6,000 after it stopped doctors from giving a lethal injection to Mariette Buntjens.

Days later, the 74-year-old woman was instead taken by ambulance to her private address to die “in peaceful surroundings”.

Buntjens’ family later sued the nursing home for causing their mother “unnecessary mental and physical suffering”.

A civil court in Louvain upheld the complaint and fined the home €3,000 and ordered it to pay compensation of €1,000 to each of Mrs Buntjens’s three adult children.

During the hearing, the three judges decided unanimously that “the nursing home had no right to refuse euthanasia on the basis of conscientious objection”.

The test case clarifies Belgian law to mean that only individual medical professionals – and not hospitals or care homes – have the right to refuse euthanasia requests.

The judgement could spell the closures of scores of Catholic-run nursing and care homes across Belgium because the Church has stated explicitly that it will not permit euthanasia “under any circumstance”.

Sylvie Tack, the lawyer for the family, said that “it is now black and white that an institution cannot intervene in an agreement between doctor and patient”.



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relentless liberalisation of the practice of euthanasia in the Low Countries.

Robert Ffello, the Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent South, and a Catholic, said the judgement was “a worrying development”.

“There is a real risk that care homes will now close across Belgium with tragic consequences to those people who are in them and who may in future need them,” said Ffello.

“It shows yet again that life is held in such low regard in Belgium,” he continued.

“It is an absolute tragedy that euthanasia is now seen to be a right. If you look around the world, anywhere assisted suicide has been introduced there is a constant erosion of any safeguards that have been put in place. This a further leap down the slippery path warned about time and time again and it shows that those warnings were true.”

He added: “It strengthens my resolve that we have to protect people from this constant encroachment.”

Belgium legalised euthanasia in 2003, a year after neighbouring Holland, and it now has one of the most permissive euthanasia regimes in the world.

Technically, euthanasia remains an offence, however, with the law protecting doctors from prosecution only if they abide by carefully-set criteria.

It is limited to adults who are suffering unbearably and who are able to give their consent. Two years ago the law was also extended to “emancipated children”.

In spite of so-called safeguards, critics have argued that the law is interpreted so liberally that euthanasia is available on demand, with doctors giving lethal injections also to people who are

This is an important precedent for the newspaper.

is been dubbed Belgium’s “Dr Death”, also

ees the nursing home as an extension of a ect euthanasia, they will think twice e still common, both in nursing homes very important.”

ain who see it as further evidence of the

disabled, demented and mentally ill.

Deaf twins Marc and Eddy Verbessem, 45, were granted their wish to die in December 2012, for instance, after they learned they were likely to go blind, and Nancy Verhelst, 44, a transsexual, was also killed by lethal injection after her doctors botched her sex change operation, leaving her with physical deformities she felt made her look like a “monster”.

There have been incremental annual increases in the numbers of deaths by euthanasia, and the latest figures have revealed that numbers of doctor-assisted deaths have doubled within the last five years, soaring from 954 in 2010 to 2,021 in 2015.

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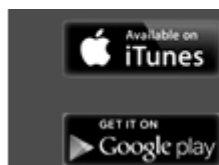
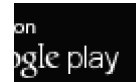
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