

An Elderly Patient's Options

Category: Suicide

written by Dominick Falzone | February 8, 2023

A year ago, I suffered a cardiac emergency. While I was standing at the bathroom sink, I felt dizzy, and the next thing I knew, I was lying on my back on the floor, with my head cushioned on top of a package of toilet paper. I might have died there, peacefully, but I woke up. I thought that drinking some water might help, but when I stood to do so, I felt dizzy at the kitchen sink. I scurried to flick the front door's deadbolt open, and then I lay down and telephoned the police and fire departments.

They rushed me to a hospital where I stayed for ten days. I followed up with a cardiologist on an outpatient basis. I have largely recovered.

Some days I wonder whether the cardiologist and other medical professionals can chalk up my recovery as a success, or whether they have only given me an opportunity to incur some worse medical problem.

Recently, I have watched two acquaintances suffer from strokes. I desperately wish to avoid experiencing what they have been through.

My ninety-five-year-old aunt had a stroke while she was hospitalized for a cardiac problem. Her horrified daughter, who is a nurse, was watching, and could not prevent this. My aunt was bedridden for three years until she died, and could not even move while she was in bed.

An elderly friend also had a stroke. Afterwards, he could walk somewhat, and he lived with his girlfriend. But as his disease progressed, his activities became more and more constricted. When his girlfriend developed health problems of her own and could not care for him, he was forced to move out of town to live with his son. I am single, and if I have a stroke, I will have neither a girlfriend, nor an adult child to take care of me.

I contrast these experiences to that of my father, who had a stroke decades ago and died the same day that he was taken to the hospital. My mother tried to comfort me by saying that he would not have wanted to live after having been crippled by a stroke. I did not fully appreciate what she told me until I saw what my aunt and friend went through.

And strokes aren't the only disease I seem to be at risk for. I am also concerned about prostate cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

I do not want to end up in a rest home. I do not want my life to be constricted. I do not have financial assets for long term care, and Medicare would likely fund inadequate nursing care for me.

A major newspaper recently had an article regarding end-of-life. Readers had an on-line discussion about suicide as a way of avoiding rest homes and the progression of painful terminal diseases. Some readers advocated suicide. Others advised that any method (pills, gunshot) could malfunction, leaving

the patient alive, but horribly wounded.

One attractive option was to join an end-of-life organization and travel to Switzerland where assisted suicide is legal. But this is not feasible for those who develop certain types of problems suddenly, such as a stroke, or for those who cannot afford the cost of travel overseas.

I wish our leaders in the federal and state governments would legalize assisted suicide.

*Dominick Falzone
Los Angeles, California*

The National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline number is 988.
The Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support
to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress
24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.
Call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.