

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: david.simmons6@undisclosed.com

To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com

Date: December 17, 2014 8:54 p.m. EST

Subject: Essay on Death With Dignity by Charles Hamlin, MD

Dear Sir,

Dr. Hamlin's essay makes a strong case for Death with Dignity. Myself an orthopedic surgeon, I needed to dissect his rhetoric down to the bone.

Touting freedom of choice, Hamlin asserts that competent adults with terminal conditions have the right to a peaceful end of life AND medical help to shorten the dying phase. Arguing that the choice of passing on to death should be taken for granted but noting this is only lawful in five American states, Hamlin decries continuing resistance in three forms: Where religious beliefs obstruct, he contends that God gives choice to man. Where fears of exploitation hinder, Hamlin counters that the 16-year Oregon experience reassures. Where medical tradition prevents, Hamlin urges that compassionate physician assistance be permissible.

I agree with this bare-bones position, yet I must dress it up with two caveats: There should be a mechanism to avoid a rush to judgment by patients. There should be a means to protect the choice of nonparticipation by providers.

Of note in the history of end-of-life debating, it was 50 years ago that Dr. Hannibal Hamlin awakened the medical community to recognizing that, while a beating heart and breathing lungs may maintain "the look of life in the face of death," a dead brain signals "the point of no return." Now, in his own way, his son keeps the ball in the air.

David P. Simmons, MD

David P. Simmons lives in the Boston area with diplomas from Yale College and the Yale School of Medicine in hand. David devoted 35 years to orthopedics. Retirement spawned two light mystery novels (*The Sum of Her Parts* and *No End*

of Guilty Creatures), a French pastiche (*Le Docteur Maigret*), and its translation into English (*Doctor Maigret*).