FNU students debate for and against legalising euthanasia in Fiji

Team Nasinu all smiles after winning the debate

Euthanasia, the act of terminating a chronically ill person's life on the choice of the patient, remains a controversial topic around the world. While it is legal and normalised in some countries, it remains a taboo in many.

There are many views on this topic and to get a take on what our future leaders think, the topic of whether euthanasia should be legalised in Fiji was chosen for a debate final between teams from the Fiji National University's (FNU) Tamavua Nursing and Nasinu Campuses.

The Tamavua, School of Nursing team comprised of three second-year student nurses who debated 'for' the legalisation of Euthanasia. Team member Priyashna Shankar, a second-year Nursing student said a great advantage will mean releasing patients from their sufferings.

According to Shankar, the term euthanasia means "good death" and that the right to die should be a personal choice of the patient or family members and not that of the government or health professionals.

"I think we need to care for the person's autonomy. This means the ethical right of a patient to make decisions about their medical care without any interference of any health providers," she stated.

"Presently, what I have noticed in the clinics is that patients fear, what it takes to live with a chronic illness rather than death itself. As stated earlier one has a right to live and similarly, they should have a right to die if they want to," debated Shankar.

While giving examples of countries that have legalised Euthanasia, second-year Nursing student Devika Kumar emphasised on the pros of Euthanasia.

"Euthanasia empowers people to put an end to prolonged misery and intent sufferings that one undergoes while dying which could be ended in a dignified way through euthanasia where the patient has the option to choose his/her death. If other countries, can respect the decision of their ill patients, why not Fiji?" argued Kumar.

"It is a right we all would want if we were in the same position," she explained.

Belgium, India, Netherlands, Columbia are few countries that have legalised euthanasia under some circumstances.

The opposing team member, second-year Bachelor of Commerce student Prisila Prasad strongly opposed this opinion.

According to Prasad for a close-knitted society like Fiji where religion, culture and family play a major role in our everyday life, euthanasia should not be entertained.

"From a moral point of view, no one should have the right to take one's life, this is just murder. Almost all religious texts are in agreement that murder is a sin and a criminal act," claimed Prasad.

Prasad recollected prominent Australian euthanasia campaigner Dr Phillip Nitschke's 2012 petition to have Euthanasia clinic in Fiji that was declined by the Fiji Medical Association which suggested there was no need for such clinic in Fiji.

"Earlier this year, an independent newspaper in the UK covered a story of a man who was pronounced to have brain dead. But, he woke up," she said.

"That is why we should never legalise euthanasia in Fiji. We should always have hope as a nation of believers, we should always pray for a miracle," said Prasad.

Also sharing the same sentiments, second-year FNU student Metui Ame said "The government of Fiji recognises the right to live and has put it as a fundamental right that no other human can take away your life. It is simply just murder".

"Hospitals is for the hopeful, to have a better hope, a chance for survival to be alive, to have a second chance, not where you go when you want to die. It is very important that we kill the pain but not the patient," he pleaded.

After the tight battle, Team Nasinu were declared the winners. The 3-member winning team received $200 with 1 terabyte hard drive each. The debate was organised by FNU's Office of the Registrar - Department of Student Support Services.

Student Support Coordinator Vijayta Sharma said that debates are a good platform for academic engagement and it enhances students critical thinking, effective research demonstrations and overall good and effective public speaking and information delivery.

"Our office encourages students of all campuses to form teams and participate in such competitions to learn more and develop excellent critical thinking skills," she said.

The FNU Inter-Campus debate competition has become an annual event since 2016.

The Central Debate final held between Team Tamavua, Nursing and Team Nasinu