

Kevorkian 'treatment' takes two more lives

by Linda Everett

Jack Kevorkian, the out-of-work Michigan pathologist responsible for killing an Oregon woman with a homemade murder device last year, has been involved in the deaths of yet two more women. On the evening of Oct. 23, Kevorkian alerted the Oakland County sheriff's department that two "doctor-assisted suicides" could be found in a secluded cabin in an Oakland Township state park outside Detroit. When the authorities arrived, they found Kevorkian, his sister Margo Janus, and, later, one of his attorneys, Michael Schwartz, ready to launch the next assault on the precept of Western civilization that forbids one individual to take the life of another.

While witnesses to the killing refused to talk to authorities, pleading the Fifth Amendment, Kevorkian's attorney Geoffrey Fieger told reporters that the latest deaths could not have occurred without his client's expertise.

As soon as the latest victims, Majorie Wantz, 58, and Sherry Miller, 43, were found, Michigan was hit with a blizzard of pro-suicide brainwashing that rivals the push for the Hemlock Society's assisted-suicide ballot initiative in Washington State. We are told that Kevorkian hooked Majorie Wantz intravenously to a device similar to the one which he had used in the death of Janet Adkins in June 1990. With her husband nearby, Wantz allegedly tugged on a string and released lethal drugs into her system. Once satisfied that Wantz was dead, Kevorkian turned to Sherry Miller who was lying on another cot next to Wantz. Miller, her face covered with a mask connected to a tank of deadly carbon monoxide gas, allegedly used a screwdriver fashioned into a make-shift lever to release the gas, and died. Her parents and a friend were present.

Neither woman was "terminal," but Kevorkian said they needed his "help." Wantz had painful complications of pelvic laser surgery in 1988. Last August, when Wantz told a Detroit television talk show audience that she wanted to die, her depression was so apparent that Berrien County Prosecutor Gregory Cleveland referred her for psychiatric evaluation. Sherry Miller, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis a decade ago, testified on behalf of Kevorkian and his "services" last January. Miller said she was "disgusted with life," and despondent because she was virtually helpless and dependent on her parents since her divorce several years ago.

Did he manipulate a suicide fixation?

Last February, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Alice Gilbert permanently enjoined Kevorkian from using his "suicide machine." Judge Gilbert wrote that Kevorkian is unqualified to practice in internal medicine or psychiatry, and has no training or clinical experience in the care of patients. Yet Kevorkian's attorney Geoffrey Fieger told reporters that both women had been under Kevorkian's treatment for nearly two years! Psychiatrists trained in suicide prevention speculate that the women may have gone to Kevorkian to have their death wish reinforced or affirmed. No one knows whether Kevorkian manipulated these women for his own goals. What is known is that under Kevorkian's "treatment," the victims were fixated on suicide as the only solution for their problems, excluding all available treatment options.

Court records indicate that physicians from several hospitals that Majorie Wantz consulted for pain relief, said that she consistently refused to complete a course of proven non-narcotic medication therapy that could have relieved her pain. She also refused hospitalization for treatment for her depression which exacerbated the pain. Wantz was "treatable," one Sinai Hospital doctor wrote in his petition to have her committed for psychiatric observation, but she rejected "the notion that medical science can help her condition." There is no evidence that Miller ever sought help from groups that specialize in assisting those with multiple sclerosis to live nearly normal lives, take up jobs, or acquire technical aids that allow more independent living arrangements.

More importantly, Kevorkian did not seek such assistance. He does have "strict qualifications" for patients before he kills them. They must allow him to refer them to specialists to ensure their condition is terminal or incurable, debilitating, and painful; and the patient's family must unanimously support the decision to die by lethal injection. Neither woman was terminal, and relatives did oppose the murder arrangement. Somehow, by October, all this changed; the women met Kevorkian's criteria, and he gave them the only treatment he offers—death.

After murder charges against Kevorkian were dropped in the Adkins killing (the court said she wanted to die, so it was not murder), Assistant Prosecutor Michael Modelski warned, "If in fact [Kevorkian] is allowed to go on with what he is doing, we're talking about potentially 50 dead people in a short time." Kevorkian wanted to open a suicide center. Then, contradicting his promise to abide by the permanent injunction, he boasted that he would kill again, "if I have to. I'm a doctor. It's my duty!" Authorities have not determined if Kevorkian violated the injunction, which his attorneys have appealed.

Sen. Fred Dillington, (R-Fowlerville) sponsored a bill that would make assisted suicide a felony in Michigan. Yet, after three deaths, Rep. Perry Bullard (D-Ann Arbor), who let a similar bill die in his committee last year, won't allow the bill through without a committee to "study" the issue.