

Special News Report

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**DEBATE OVER DEATH
WITH DIGNITY****Netherlands is valid
example of dangers**

Roland Halpern (Letters, March 3) misapprehends the reason for noting the Netherlands' experience in the discus-

sion of physician-assisted suicide. Those who oppose the current physician-assisted suicide proposals are well aware of the distinctions between those proposals and the situation in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands' experience is nevertheless instructive because it is evidence of where we would be headed if the Legislature legalized physician-assisted suicide.

In the Netherlands, both physician-assisted suicide and physician-assisted death have been practiced for decades. While illegal during most of that time, both were condoned because of so-called "safeguards" put in place. Now both practices are legal and the government's own reports show that direct killing by the physician is 10 times more common than assisted suicide and that, at one point, one-third of the patients killed had not given their explicit consent. That is the slippery slope.

It is also wholly disingenuous for proponents of the bill to act as if discussion of physician-assisted death as a next step is somehow unwarranted when Governor Cayetano's Blue Ribbon Panel on Living and Dying with Dignity proposed legalizing of both physician-assisted suicide and physician-assisted

death in its 1998 report.

To pretend that reality doesn't exist is the real misinformation marring the debate on physician-assisted suicide.

The slippery slope, fear of abuse and coercion among elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and the creation of a 'duty to die' are reasons the U.S. Supreme Court cited when declaring there is no constitutional right to physician-assisted suicide. They are the reasons why 49 states have rejected physician-assisted suicide. And they are just some of the reasons why Hawaii should reject physician-assisted suicide, as well. To dismiss them out-of-hand is irresponsible.

Kelly M. Rosati

*Executive director
Hawaii Family Forum*