Euthanasia in the Netherlands
The Space between Law and Practice

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Aims

- What Dutch euthanasia looks like in practice
- Differences between law and practice
- Lessons from The Netherlands
An Ethnographic Study

- General practice, home and nursing home ethnography
- 15 General practitioners (10 intensive case studies)
- 650 General patient population
- 192 Chronic illness/end-of-life (25 intensive case studies)
- 35 Expert interviews
- Observation/interviews with physicians, families, healthcare workers, and experts on Dutch culture and euthanasia
FIGURE 1. Five Common Stages of Euthanasia Talk (n=14)
The euthanasia or assisted suicide must always be performed by a physician who:

- holds the conviction that the request by the patient was voluntary and well-considered,
- holds the conviction that the patient's suffering was lasting and unbearable,
- has informed the patient about the situation he was in and about his prospects,
- and the patient holds the conviction that there was no other reasonable solution for the situation he was in,
- has consulted at least one other independent physician who has seen the patient and has given his written opinion on the requirements of due care, referred to in parts a-d, and
- has terminated a life or assisted in a suicide with due care.
**The Law**

- Series of decisions and activities
- Patient making decisions
- Request parameters (voluntary and well-considered, suffering unbearable)
- Physicians weigh requirements
- No mention of family
- No mention of dialogue among physicians, patients, and family

**In Practice**

- Series of discussions
- Few end in euthanasia
- Activates patient role (talk about what matters)
- Activates physician role (feel like family)
- Families central (basis for the conversation)
- Builds relationships
Euthanasia as a Cultural Practice

- Euthanasia largely a dialogue
- Euthanasia talk builds social bonds where before there was “niks meer aan te doen” (nothing more to do).
- Euthanasia talk is a form of palliative care.
Lessons from the Netherlands
Lessons from the Netherlands

- Important life decisions are made in consultation, in the context of relationships
- Laws exist in culture and therefore reflect and are impacted by cultural processes
- Is PAD a good fit for US?
  - How does US cultural processes impact PAD practice?