

Assisted suicide has national support as Kevorkian leaves jail: "Dr. Death" paroled

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As Jack Kevorkian was released June 1 from a Michigan prison after serving eight years for second-degree murder in the assisted death of a man with Lou Gehrig's disease, new polls suggested that his cause retains strong support.

An Associated Press–Ipsos poll released as the frail pathologist, 79, left prison showed that 53 percent of Americans believe that Kevorkian never should have gone to jail for the assisted-suicide campaign he championed in the 1990s; 40 percent supported Kevorkian's imprisonment.

The Michigan Parole Board granted Kevorkian's request in December to leave prison because of good behavior and a promise not to conduct more assisted suicides. Ailing from heart and lung disease and hepatitis, the man once called Dr. Death said through an attorney that he would remain an advocate for changing state laws.

In the poll, just 30 percent of the 1,000 adults questioned agreed that doctors and nurses should do everything possible to save the life of a patient. More than two-thirds said that there are circumstances in which a patient should be allowed to die with help. The survey was conducted between May 22 and May 24.

A plurality, 48 percent, said the law should not bar doctors from helping terminally ill patients end their own lives by giving them a prescription for lethal drugs; 44 percent said it should be illegal.

A Gallup Poll taken last month yielded similar views on assisted suicide. A majority—56 percent—of 1,003 adults said doctors should be allowed to legally assist a suffering, terminally ill patient in his or her death if the patient requests it; 49 percent of those surveyed said doctor-assisted suicide is morally acceptable.

Ned McGrath, a spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Detroit, said the Catholic Church fought Kevorkian's campaign and would continue to do so.

“For 10 years, Jack Kevorkian's actions resembled those of a pathological serial killer,” he said. “It will be truly regrettable if he's now treated as a celebrity parolee instead of the convicted murderer he is.” —*Religion News Service*