Self Determination

Case Scenario: In 1996, the patient J.B., a 46 year old Vietnam Veteran was diagnosed with prostate cancer from Agent Orange. After immediate removal of his prostate and 8 weeks of radiation to the affected area, J.B. was given an all clear of cancer. In 2001, after yearly checks by his cancer provider, the prostate cancer had decided to return even though his prostate had been removed. The plan of treatment gave him a life expectancy of 3-5 years. Those years came and went by with research providing new treatment. Then late 2009, J.B. was diagnosed with metastasis to the spine, hip, and ribs. The cancer provider gave him six months to one year of survival. Chemotherapy was initiated and an additional round of radiation was given. Over the next three years the cancer would steadily increase to more bones in the body, neuropathy graduated to his hands and feet, falling became a daily issue, pain became more and more intense. The pain at which point became so intense an internal pain pump was placed similar to an epidural with the medication of fentanyl to be distributed over each hour and a patient controlled remote was able to be used for an additional dosage. This pain pump controlled the lower portion of the body and then oral pain medications were given to help the pain in the upper portion. In 2014, a subcutaneous pain pump was ordered to help the upper half of the body and lower half since the internal pain pump was being increased at a rapid rate due to lack of coverage. Multiple trips to the emergency room, the ups and downs of battling the nasty disease, J.B. at one point stated “I just want to be done, I would rather die than go through this pain”. Hospice was initiated, and more oral pain medications were given for the next two months at a failing rate of a pain free patient. The first week of July of 2014, moaning and groaning could be heard throughout each hour of the day. The pain medications were continuously given on a routine basis and increased routinely. On July 9th of 2014, the patient J.B. finally lost consciousness with the inability to eat or drink due to the lethargy of medications given and the disease process. The patient J.B. a 64 year old father of three and husband, finally after years of battling went to his final resting place on July 11th, 2014.

If the State of Michigan was allowed to have the Death with Dignity Law enacted, my father, a veteran who actively served his country for 20 years would have been able to make the choice to die in dignity rather than being in constant intolerable pain. He most certainly wanted to live, but the disease was emotionally and physically killing him inside and out. He loved life and he lived every day with a positive attitude. Regardless if he is a Christian or an Atheist, every individual should have a right to die in dignity. If your religion does not permit this act, then this person should choose to die in pain.