INVITATION to the Public defence of

Sigrid DIERICKX

To obtain the academic degree of

‘DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES’

‘DOCTOR IN HEALTH SCIENCES’

Euthanasia practice in Belgium : A population-based evaluation of trends and currently debated issues

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Summary of the dissertation

Euthanasia is subject of intense debate in many countries where life expectancy is high and degenerative diseases are the leading causes of death. In Belgium, euthanasia can be practiced under strict, legally defined conditions since 2002. Concerns about developments in euthanasia practice in Belgium persist, particularly abroad. Additionally, empirical evidence on the euthanasia practice in countries where it is legal is needed to inform current euthanasia debates. For this dissertation, a secondary analysis of the official databases of all euthanasia cases reported to the Federal Control and Evaluation Committee for Euthanasia was performed. Also, data from a population-based survey among physicians attending a representative sample of death certificates in Flanders were analysed.

This dissertation provides insight into the Belgian euthanasia practice by studying trends in euthanasia practice and by providing empirical evidence on particular issues that have been subject of (international) debate, i.e. involvement of palliative care in euthanasia practice, euthanasia for people with psychiatric disorders or dementia, and registration of euthanasia on death certificates. This dissertation underlines the importance of detailed monitoring of euthanasia practice. To meet this, it is to be recommended that monitoring by the Federal Control and Evaluation Committee for Euthanasia is supplemented by thorough empirical research into euthanasia and other medical end-of-life practices.

Curriculum Vitae

Sigrid Dierickx was born on April 6th, 1990 in Dendermonde, Belgium. She holds a master's degree in Sociology (2013, Ghent University) and Health Care Management and Policy (2014, KU Leuven). In September 2014 she joined the End-of-Life Care Research Group (Vrije Universiteit Brussel & Ghent University) as a doctoral researcher to study the euthanasia practice in Belgium. Currently, she still works as a researcher at the End-of-Life Care Research Group and is involved in a study on supportive and palliative day care centres in Flanders.