

Dr. Winsome's Clinic

Sanctioned Suicide, the subreddit, has about 40,000 subscribers. The forum has over 10 million page views per month. Steve Heigel, in Cortez, Colorado, visited Sanctioned Suicide every day of the week for six months. He was well liked on the message boards and everyone on Sanctioned Suicide sincerely believed that Steve Heigel would take his own life.

Steve Heigel did everything right. Accordingly, the forum gave him the recipe for a proper life taking cocktail. Steve received the ingredients and preparation in a private message. That secret formula is a coveted secret closely kept by the Sanctioned Suicide community. Yet, Steve got it. Then, Steve committed a cardinal sin among the community members at Sanctioned Suicide. Steve discussed his suicidal ideations with his family.

Sanctioned Suicide community members reprimanded Steve harshly when he logged back onto the forum after being released from his mental health hold. “We told you this would happen.” “All your work went to shit.” Steve was no longer able to secure the ingredients for the cocktail. Nonetheless, Steve happily returned to his online community after coming home from the psych ward.

Steve explained his situation in a private message. “My town’s not that big and not that small. I told my family how to make it but I didn’t tell them how I found the info. They think I'm smart. Anyway, I can’t buy weird things or get mail right now.”

“Ok. I’ll think about it and write you back.” Steve messaged someone with the username FranM288. That user had a lot of credibility in the community. They advised thousands of people. FranM288 actively posted on forums about the meaninglessness of life, the hopelessness of trying, and they encouraged other users to private message them about next steps. FranM288 advised that these private messages were for information purposes only. Yet, FranM288 also offered to provide extensive details about effective suicide methods. Confidentiality was also

expected in the private messages.

“Alright. I’ve had a lot of luck advising people in Canada under their MAID law. They just passed something like it in the USA. I like that you didn't talk about this great community during your institutionalization. You won’t have to be institutionalized if you kill yourself the correct way next time and are more secretive.

“I want you to do something for me and then I’ll walk you through some good next steps where you could avoid legal issues next time.”

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Dr. Dave Winsome reviewed the notebook in front of him. The patient presented a clear cut case of non-hodgkins lymphoma. Cortez, CO, had a rural hospital and this patient had a small chance of recovery using conventional treatments. The closest oncologist was in Durango, CO.

Dr. Winsome felt that he knew a thing or two about practicing medicine without the input of a specialist. Dr. Winsome was a family doctor with a certified MD from Herbert Werthheim School of Medicine in Miami, Florida. Then, Dr. Winsome finished his residency with another generalist in Cortez, CO. Dave liked practicing medicine in the same town where he played high school football.

In high school, Dave was a star receiver. The team could have went to state with a different quarterback. Everyone tells Dave this during his class reunions in Cortez, CO. In a small town, people go the extra mile for folks they know well. Dave didn’t know this patient with non-hodgkins lymphoma. Based on that, and on other factors, Dr. Winsome prepared for the consultation.

“Alright Ms. Stokes, we have a lot to discuss. Do you have family?”

“Yes, I have an adult son in Nebraska and a daughter at University of Kansas in Lawrence.”

“Ok, they’re older, hope both of them are doing well. Could we talk about your results?”

“Ok, I’m nervous.”

“Well, there’s no easy way to start these conversations. And, it’s the most difficult part of my practice. The results are clear, you have stage 3 non-hodgkins lymphoma. I'm sorry. Would you like to talk about this and how you feel right now?”

“It’s a lot. What do you recommend for next steps?”

“Well, you receive services under the state’s healthcare program, is that correct that the state funds your healthcare?”

“Yes.”

“Ok, well, in your situation, there are some intensive and extreme treatments that may be available. We’d have to petition for those and it could be a substantial amount of paperwork. I don't recommend you go through those treatments alone, do you live alone?”

“I do live alone.”

“Ok, than maybe one of your kiddos could come back. What about your daughter, could she come home from Lawrence? How would you feel about having your daughter come home from college for a bit to help you with your care ? Additionally, you could use the money saved from school for better care.”

“Is there another option?”

“Well, Colorado did just pass an assistance at end of life law.”

“What is that?”

“Now, the criteria for an assisted death discusses an ‘grievous and irremediable medical condition.’ Now, your condition is unequivocally ‘grievous.’ Regarding the treat ability of your condition, the legislature allows you to forego treatment and ‘opt out’ of that difficult and painful process, if you’d like.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Ok good, as you make this voluntary choice, essentially weigh the costs and benefits of treatment versus assisted death and I’ll help you weigh those costs myself.”

Three weeks later, Rebecca Stokes received state assisted euthanasia. She was 53 years old.

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“Steve, if you think about it, life is a grievous condition. Right?”

“Sure.” Steve replied to FranM288.

“You’re 17 and a half. And, I know you’ve been depressed for sometime. Talk to me a lot about your depression and how there’s no remedy. By the time you turn 18, you’ll find a way out. I think you live in Cortez, CO, right?”