Point of view NVK on ‘Procedure active life-ending treatment newborns’

Utrecht, March 10th 2005

The board of the Dutch Pediatric Association (NVK) has read the article ‘The Groningen Protocol – Euthanasia in Severely Ill Newborns’ in The New England Journal of Medicine of March 10, 2005. The point of view regarding the Groningen Protocol is as follows:

The NVK supports the authors’ plea to establish a national protocol in The Netherlands about life-ending treatment regarding the very small but important group of newborns, as referred to in the article, with severe suffering and without any hope of improvement in the future. The NVK also supports the authors’ plea to establish a national committee with not only legal, but also medical and ethical experts, that assesses the decision-making process using this protocol.

It is the NVK’s opinion that such an adjusted system of reporting and assessing of deliberate ending of life is important, because more transparency about this issue is necessary. Today, the willingness among physicians to report cases of deliberate ending of life is limited, as studies referred to in the article show. This is due to uncertainty about the consequences of reporting, and also to insufficient transparency about the standards that the physician’s actions will be judged by. As a result, deliberate ending of life remains often legally unassessed, and the quality of the decision-making process itself is unclear.

According to the NVK, the problematic situation mentioned above should be addressed as soon as possible. Creating a national protocol and a national assessment- or advise committee will, according to the NVK, improve the quality of the decision-making process, increase the willingness among physicians to report and prevent that deliberate ending of life remains legally and socially uncontrolled.

The NVK-board considers the Groningen Protocol, as referred to in the article in The New England Journal of Medicine and earlier in the Dutch journal Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde of January 22nd 2005, an important and carefully designed tool to assess deliberate life-ending procedures in newborn infants. The protocol is based on the conviction that deliberate ending of life in newborns can be an option in extreme circumstances and only if strict requirements are met. The NVK-board finds that the Groningen Protocol can form the building stones of a national protocol in The Netherlands. The NVK-board will suggest this to its members in the next annual meeting.

Finally, the NVK hopes that the Dutch government will soon present a proposal on this issue, as was promised earlier.

Go to The New England Journal of Medicine

Addition July 1st 2005: the NVK has accepted the Groningen Protocol as a national protocol in The Netherlands. In the NVK-members-meeting of June 23rd 2005 the members agreed with the proposal of the NVK-board.

Go to the press release ‘NVK neemt Gronings Protocol over’ (only available in Dutch).