

• Reading Comprehension 1 Level 12

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

The word *euthanasia* is of Greek origin and literally means “a good death.” The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as “the act of killing a person painlessly for reasons of mercy.” Such killing can be done through active means, such as administering a lethal injection, or by passive means, such as withholding medical care or food and water.

In recent years in the United States, there have been numerous cases of active euthanasia in the news. They usually involve the deliberate killing of ill or incapacitated persons by relatives or friends who plead that they can no longer bear to see their loved ones suffer. Although such killings are a crime, the perpetrators are often dealt with leniently by our legal system, and the media usually portrays them as compassionate heroes who take personal risks to save another from unbearable suffering.

The seeming acceptance of active forms of euthanasia is alarming, but we face a bigger, **more insidious** threat from passive forms of euthanasia. Every year, in hospitals and nursing homes around the country, there are growing numbers of documented deaths caused by caregivers withholding life-sustaining care, including food and water, from vulnerable patients who cannot speak for themselves.

While it is illegal to kill someone directly, for example with a gun or knife, in many cases the law has put its stamp of approval on causing death by omitting needed care. Further, many states have “living will” laws designed to protect those who withhold treatment, and there have been numerous court rulings which have approved of patients being denied care and even starved and dehydrated to death.

Because such deaths occur quietly within the confines of hospitals and nursing homes, they can be kept hidden from the public. Most euthanasia victims are old or very ill, so their deaths might be attributed to a cause other than the denial of care that really killed them. Further, it is often relatives of the patient who request that care be withheld. In one court case, the court held that decisions to withhold life-sustaining care may be made not only by close family members but also by a number of third parties, and that such decisions need not be reviewed by the judicial system if there is no disagreement between decision makers and medical staff. The court went so far as to rule that a nursing home may not refuse to participate in the fatal withdrawal of food and water from an incompetent patient!

“Extraordinary” or “heroic” treatment need not be used when the chance for recovery is poor and medical intervention would serve only to prolong the dying process. But to deny customary and reasonable care or to deliberately starve or dehydrate someone because he or she is very old or very ill should not be permitted. Most of the cases coming before the courts do not involve withholding heroic measures from imminently dying people, but rather they seek approval for denying basic care, such as administration of food and water, to people who are not elderly or terminally ill, but who are permanently incapacitated. These people could be expected to live indefinitely, though in an impaired state, if they were given food and water and minimal treatment.

No one has the right to judge that another’s life is not worth living. The basic right to life should not be **abridged** because someone decides that someone else’s quality of life is too low. If we base the right to life on quality of life standards, there is no logical place to draw the line.

To protect vulnerable patients, we must foster more positive attitudes towards people with serious and incapacitating illnesses and conditions. Despite the ravages of their diseases, they are still our fellow human beings and deserve our care and respect. We must also enact

positive legislation that will protect vulnerable people from those who consider their lives meaningless or too costly to maintain and who would cause their deaths by withholding life-sustaining care such as food and water.

Questions

- 1) The tone of the author can best be described as
- A. pleading
 - B. argumentative
 - C. compassionate
 - D. emphatic
 - E. empathetic
- 2) In paragraph 3, the author finds starvation and dehydration induced euthanasia is to be “more insidious” because
- A. euthanasia is legally considered to be a criminal act
 - B. the public’s attitude toward euthanasia is becoming more positive
 - C. it often involves those who cannot protest
 - D. the patient has asked to die with dignity
 - E. its perpetrators are viewed as kindly caregivers
- 3) As used in paragraph 3, what is the best synonym for **insidious**?
- A. mischievous
 - B. treacherous
 - C. seductive
 - D. apparent
 - E. cumulative
- 4) The author maintains that death by withholding care is
- A. largely confined to hospitals
 - B. largely confined to the terminally ill
 - C. often requested by family members
 - D. approved by living wills
 - E. difficult to prove if prosecuted
- 5) As used in paragraph 7, which is the best definition of **abridged**?
- A. trimmed
 - B. curtailed
 - C. lengthened
 - D. extended
 - E. compressed
- 6) Using the passage as a guide, it can be inferred that the author would find euthanasia less objectionable in cases in which
- I. the patient’s death is imminent
 - II. the patient has left instructions in a living will not to provide care
 - III. the patient refuses to accept nourishment
- A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II and III

- 7) The main idea of paragraph 7 is that
- A. lawyers will be unable to prosecute or defend caregivers
 - B. no comprehensive right or wrong definition of euthanasia will exist
 - C. using a subjective standard will make the decision to end an individual's life arbitrary
 - D. no boundary will exist between euthanasia and care omission
 - E. 'quality of life' will no longer be able to be rigidly defined
- 8) In the final paragraph the author writes, "Despite the ravages of their diseases, they are still our fellow human beings and deserve our care and respect." The main purpose of this statement is to
- A. prove a previous argument
 - B. illustrate an example
 - C. gainsay a later statement
 - D. object to a larger idea
 - E. justify an earlier statement

Answers and Explanations

1) **C**

A passage with a *compassionate* tone is written with the awareness of the suffering of others along with a desire to stop that suffering. Here, the author is writing out of the desire to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves. Since the author is acting on behalf of others who suffer, the tone is compassionate. This means **(C)** is the best choice. A *pleading* tone is one where the author begs the reader to adopt his or her position. Since the author of the passage above does not beg the reader to do anything, **(A)** is incorrect. An argumentative tone is one where the author writes in opposition to a different viewpoint. Here, the author simply presents his or her side to the issue and does not discussing opposing points, so **(B)** is not the best choice. If the tone were *emphatic*, the author would make his or her points forcefully and with great emphasis. Here, the author clearly takes a side on an issue, but is not particularly forceful, so **(D)** is not the best choice either. If the tone were *empathetic*, the author would write with sensitivity to someone else's feelings. Since the author is simply presenting his or her opinion on the issue, the tone is not empathetic and **(E)** is incorrect.

2) **C**

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "we face a bigger, more insidious threat from passive forms of euthanasia. Every year, in hospitals and nursing homes around the country, there are growing numbers of documented deaths caused by caregivers withholding life-sustaining care, including food and water, from vulnerable patients who cannot speak for themselves." We can infer from this information that euthanasia caused by withholding care is especially insidious because it is often done to people who cannot protest. This means **(C)** is correct. While the author does note in paragraph 4 that active euthanasia is illegal, the author only uses the word 'insidious' to refer to euthanasia by withholding care. This means **(A)** is incorrect. Again, the author does write about the public's attitude towards euthanasia in the first paragraph, but states that the trend toward withholding care is insidious in paragraph 3. This rules out **(B)**. The author finds withholding food and water insidious because it is often done to patients who cannot speak for themselves, so **(D)** is incorrect. The author does object to the perpetrators of euthanasia being viewed as compassionate, but does not call this insidious. This rules out **(E)**.

3) **B**

insidious (*adjective*): treacherous; spreading in a harmful and stealthy way.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "we face a bigger, more insidious threat from passive forms of euthanasia. Every year, in hospitals and nursing homes around the country, there are growing numbers of documented deaths caused by caregivers withholding life-sustaining care, including food and water, from vulnerable patients who cannot speak for themselves." Since the numbers of these cases is getting larger, we can infer that the practice is spreading. Since the author considers euthanasia through withholding care a 'threat,' we can infer that the author thinks that it is bad. Since the victims cannot speak for themselves, this practice can spread quietly, without notice. This means that the word *insidious* means something bad that spreads quietly. Something that is *treacherous* is dangerous because it has unforeseen hazards. Something with unforeseen dangers is similar to something dangerous that spreads stealthily, so treacherous is a good synonym for insidious. **(B)** is the best answer. Something *mischievous* might cause damage, but it does so in a playful way. This is different from spreading harm in a stealthy way, so mischievous is not a synonym for insidious. **(A)** is incorrect. Something *seductive* is alluring. This is different than spreading harm, so **(C)** is not the best answer. Something *apparent* is visible. This is different from being stealthy, so **(D)** is incorrect. Something *cumulative* is the accumulation of many things. Although something cumulative grows, it doesn't necessarily grow stealthily. This rules out **(E)**.

4) **C**

In paragraph 4, the author explains that withholding care has been sanctioned by law in many places. Then, in paragraph 5, the author writes, "it is often relatives of the patient who request that care be withheld." The reader can infer from this information that it is often family members who request that care be withheld, so **(C)** is the correct answer. In paragraph 4, we learn that withholding care is largely confined to nursing homes as well as hospitals, so **(A)** is incorrect. In paragraph 6, the author writes, "Most of the cases coming before the courts do not involve withholding heroic measures from imminently dying people, but rather they seek approval for denying basic care, such as administration of food and water, to people who are not elderly or terminally ill, but who are permanently incapacitated. These people could be expected to live indefinitely, though in an impaired state, if they were given food and water and minimal treatment." Since withholding care happens with those who could live indefinitely, **(B)** is also incorrect. The only mention of living wills occurs in paragraph 4, where the author writes, "many states have 'living will' laws designed to protect those who withhold treatment." Since this sentence is talking about laws and not about living wills themselves, we can understand that **(D)** is incorrect. The author does not discuss the difficulty of prosecuting euthanasia cases, so **(E)** is also incorrect.

5) **B**

abridged (*adjective*): shortened; curtailed; reduced.

In the first 6 paragraphs, the author argues that euthanasia by withholding care is problematic when it is used on those who cannot communicate their wishes. This means that when the author writes in paragraph 7, "The basic right to life should not be abridged because someone decides that someone else's quality of life" is too low," the author is reinforcing his earlier points, saying that the right to life should not be curtailed, or cut short, for those who cannot protest. **(B)** is correct. *Trimming* suggests cutting of excess. Since the author is concerned with the loss of basic rights, not excess rights, **(A)** is not the best answer. Euthanasia does not *lengthen* life, so **(C)** is incorrect. *Extended* means drawn out. Euthanasia does not draw out life, so **(D)** is also incorrect. Something that is *compressed* is condensed. The author is not concerned about life being condensed, so this rules out **(E)**.

6) **E**

In paragraph 6, the author argues that caregivers should not be permitted to deny customary care simply because someone is very old or ill. The author writes, "These people could be expected to live indefinitely, though in an impaired state, if they were given food and water and minimal treatment." We can understand from this information that the author thinks it is wrong to deny care if the patient could continue to live indefinitely if given the customary care. This means the author should find it less objectionable to deny

care to someone who was terminally ill. This supports **option (I)**. Since the author is primarily concerned with care being withheld from those who cannot make their wishes known, the author should find it less objectionable to withhold care from a patient who has specified in a living will that he or she did not want care. This supports **option (II)**. Again, the author is worried that care is withheld from those who cannot object. If a patient were to refuse care, they would be making their wishes known. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(E)** is correct.

7) **C**

In paragraph 7 the author writes, "No one has the right to judge that another's life is not worth living. The basic right to life should not be abridged because someone decides that someone else's quality of life is too low. If we base the right to life on 'quality of life' standards, there is no logical place to draw the line." This means the author thinks allowing care to be withheld because the patient has poor quality of life is a bad idea because people may not agree on what qualifies as a life worth living. The author thinks this will lead to the decision being made with no real standard at all, so **(C)** is the best answer. The author is concerned that there will not be a consistent standard for the decision to withhold care, not a consistent standard for the law, so **(A)** is incorrect. The author is not arguing about what euthanasia means, so **(B)** is also incorrect. The passage is about euthanasia via withholding care, so we know that care omission is a form of euthanasia. This rules out **(D)**. The author argues that no one should decide that someone else's life isn't worth living, not that the definition of 'quality of life' will be changed. This eliminates **(E)**.

8) **E**

To answer this question correctly, it helps to use context. In the final paragraph the author writes, "To protect vulnerable patients, we must foster more positive attitudes towards people with serious and incapacitating illnesses and conditions. Despite the ravages of their diseases, they are still our fellow human beings and deserve our care and respect." In the latter sentence, the author tells us that people suffering from terrible illnesses are still our fellow human beings and deserve our care and respect. This is used to justify the earlier statement that we must foster more positive attitudes towards people with serious illnesses. This means choice **(E)** is correct. The passage does not provide information to support choices (A), (B), (C), and (D). Therefore they are incorrect.