

Full response from Andrew Denton

Written by The Conversation USA

When The Conversation asked Andrew Denton to provide sources to support his assertion, he sent the following email:

We checked official published reports and sought interviews with primary sources to test the validity of the oft-repeated claims that in the Netherlands, euthanasia law has resulted in doctors killing babies.

I listened to Sydney Archbishop Dr Anthony Fisher make the claim as part of his case against assisting dying law in Australia at a public town hall debate, August 13 2015.

Where was Mr Formosa's figure from? A website [article](#) states that 650 babies were euthanised in 2013. The number is attributed as fact to the Royal Dutch Medical Society (KNMG). It is a lie.

There was no evidence for the claim in the annual reports published by the Dutch Euthanasia Review Committee.

In the Netherlands I sought clarification from KNMG Senior policy advisor Eric van Wijlick. The Netherlands law sets a minimum age of 12 for the voluntary request of euthanasia and in the past 12 years Mr van Wijlick stated that five terminally ill minors (12-18yrs) had requested and been granted help to die.

I learned that doctors faced with request from parents to end the life of their terminally ill infant followed guidelines specified in a document called the [Groningen Protocol](#) .

I interviewed the protocol author, Dr Eduard Verhagen, Paediatrics Department, University Medical Centre Groningen.

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He told me that since just before 2007 the lives of only two neonates had been ended under the Groningen Protocol.

He explained the protocol was designed and accepted nationwide by paediatricians in 2005, after ten years of discussion and that it was endorsed by the Dutch Paediatric Association.

In the assisted dying debate here in Australia, the repeated misrepresentations of the Netherlands' response to the terrible suffering of terminally ill neonates struck me not only as cruel and deceptive but also deliberate.

No country in the world has more thoroughly studied, or documented, its end-of-life medical practices than the Netherlands. Their records are there for all to see.

I encourage you to read the [transcript](#) of my interview with Dr Verhagen.

The casual slander of the Dutch medical system on Q&A – not to mention the cruel minimisation of the awful decisions the parents of these babies had to face – is an excellent example of the lengths to which opponents of assisted dying will go to in their efforts to muddy the waters of this debate; repeatedly making emotion-charged allegations, undiluted by facts.

I am glad that Q&A allowed Mr Formosa the opportunity to put these tactics in full public view.

It would be most illuminating to know who is behind the website www.lifenews.com, where they claim to get their information from, and where it is being re-published or further circulated. Perhaps a diligent Q&A viewer would be interested in doing some digging?

As we debate assisted dying law in Australia, it is important to me that our doctors and lawmakers are informed by facts and not misled by distortions.

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