

# Five deaths every day as euthanasia surges in Belgium

DOCTORS in Belgium are killing an average of five people every day by euthanasia, figures revealed yesterday.

The statistics also show a 27 per cent surge in the number of euthanasia cases in the past year.

The soaring number of deaths will inevitably fuel fears that euthanasia is out of control in Belgium, which only months ago became the first country to allow doctors to kill terminally ill children.

Last year, 1,816 cases of euthanasia were reported, compared with 1,432 in 2012, an overall jump of 26.8 per cent.

'You could say that currently there are 150 cases of euthanasia per month in Belgium or, even more telling, five people euthanised a day,' said Sudpresse, Belgium's leading French-speaking newspaper, which published the figures.

Of last year's cases, 51.7 per cent were male patients and 48.3 per cent were female. Elderly people aged from 70 to 90 made up just over half (53.5 per cent) the number, while 21 per cent were between 60 and 70 and 7 per cent were over 90 years old. The under-60s made up 15 per cent.

In 2003, Belgium was the second country in the world to legalise euthanasia after Holland liberalised the law a year earlier, becoming the first country since Nazi Germany to permit the practice. Over the past

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decade the numbers of Belgians dying by euthanasia has crept up.

There was a 25 per cent increase in the number of euthanasia deaths from 2011 to 2012, soaring from 1,133 to 1,432, a figure representing about 2 per cent of all the country's deaths.

In February, Belgium extended euthanasia to children who are terminally ill and in a state of unrelieved suffering. They must also be judged to have 'capacity of discernment', affirmed by a psychologist, and the consent of their parents.

Those killed include deaf twins Marc and Eddy Verbessem, 45, who were granted their wish to die in December 2012 after they learned they were likely to become blind.

Last year Nancy Verhelst, 44, a transsexual, was also killed by injection after doctors botched her sex change operation, leaving her feeling that she looked like a 'monster'.

Disability rights campaigner Nikki Kenward of the UK-based Distant Voices pressure group said the figures should serve as a warning to Parliament not to change the law on homicide to allow even assisted suicide.

'As the numbers of people dying from euthanasia in Belgium grow, that slippery slope comes into vision,' she said.

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