The Dutch Paediatric Association (NVK) kicked off a debate on the topic last year. It strongly supports a change. At the moment euthanasia of a child between 2 and 12 is only possible by invoking the doctrine of “force majeure” in the Dutch criminal code, which means that the doctor feels compelled to do it as an emergency measure. But this still leaves him open to prosecution. The NVK believes that age is an arbitrary criterion and that euthanasia should be available for anyone with mental competence. Some children, even if they are under 12 and desperately ill, are astonishingly rational.

A roundtable discussion at the Dutch Parliament amongst experts in medical care for children in January showed that there is a range of opinions on the topic, although most of the participants were broadly in favour of a change. The Royal Dutch Medical Association (KNMG) is in favour of studying the issue further.

Not all organisations at the roundtable wanted to amend the law. A Christian group, the NPV, pointed out that “the suffering of the parents should not be a justification for a request for termination of life of the child”. Their position was that “A society that does not protect its children loses its dignity. Let us commit to good palliative care and guidance to children - and their parents - in the last phase of life”.

A spokeswoman for the Dutch Association of Educationalists (NRC), Dr Miriam Vos, raised questions about what “hopeless and unendurable suffering”, the main criteria for euthanasia in the Netherlands, means for children. “Children younger than 12 rarely or never speak in terms of hopeless and unbearable suffering. Their verbal and nonverbal expressions may suggest this, but this is always interpreted by their doctor, parents and other health care workers.”