

# Healthcare ethics and end of life decisions



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Healthcare Ethics and End of Life Decisions Physician assisted suicide is one of the most controversial issues in the medical field. A large section of society feels that it is wrong for anyone to aid another in terminating life. This is irrespective of the health situation or condition. However, this position is considered more ideal than actual given the situation of terminally ill patients and others undergoing absolute suffering. Under these circumstances, it may be considered fair for a physician to help in terminating life. In such a situation, assisted suicide is considered a preferable option given that there is no chance that the patient may recover. Given a situation where the patient prefers death, the physician has a responsibility to provide valid information on the patient's health, avail options of handling the illness and providing final options. In cases where the doctor decides to help with death, they assume the final responsibility of administering the lethal injection.

This seems a rather controversial issue faced with a need to establish direction, so the legal fraternity has joined the debate. The aim is to establish a legal framework that guides physicians in decisions regarding assisted suicide. The mandate of establishing these laws has largely fallen under the state governments. At the moment, almost every state has a legal guideline on assisted deaths, though there is lack of the specific connection to physicians. It is quite obvious that they are also addressed under the very laws. The law under the States outlines that anyone who deliberately permits, aids, advises, coerces or encourages another to terminate their life commits manslaughter. Some laws go further to specific legal repercussions such as imprisonment.

Given the position of the law and the need for compassion, especially for <https://assignbuster.com/healthcare-ethics-and-end-of-life-decisions-essay-samples/>

terminally ill patients, controversy arises. This has required court's interpretation. Several of these cases, touching on physician-assisted suicide, have been heard across American Courts. An example is Washington et al. v. Glucksberg et al. argued in Supreme Court of the United States. The case involved physicians who had sought the indulgence of the court to declare unconstitutional the existent ban on assisted suicide. The Court, though specific to Washington, upheld the law noting assisted suicide as a crime under law (Washington et al. v. Glucksberg et al).

Looking through these presentations it is clear that the law, as indicated and interpreted by the Court, is against assisted suicide. Under these circumstances, it is proper that physicians seek not only the guidance of the law but implore their moral/ethical standing in determining and evaluating a patient's request to die. In these situations, physicians have to look at the principles of healthcare ethics. These are outlined as beneficence which requires a doctor to show kindness, compassion and non-maleficence requiring physicians to avoid harming patients, justice and autonomy which requires to respect the right of a person (patients) to make one's own decisions (Pozgar, 2012).

It is clear that physicians now face a greater challenge in proceeding with assisted suicide. This challenge demands the development of law as well as emergence of situations that have translated to unending pain and suffering. Given the need to be compassionate and the requirements of the law, the physicians must compromise. It is in this regard that healthcare ethics plays a vital role. Hopefully, an absolute application of both sides would help to address the moral as well as the arising legal issues on assisted suicide.

#### References

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