



A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

August 7, 2017

American Medical Association
AMA Plaza
330 N. Wabash Ave., Suite 39300
Chicago, IL 60611-5885

Members of the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, I am writing to express our support for the American Medical Association's (AMA) current policy position opposing physician-assisted suicide (PAS).

CHA and its member organizations strongly believe that PAS is not the solution for those who struggle at the end of life. Rather, efforts should be focused on expanding access to high quality palliative care to all who need it. We feel it is imperative that organizations such as the AMA, CHA and other groups that represent those who care for the sick continue to inform policymakers that the basic tenets of medicine are to do no harm and to provide care and comfort for those who cannot be cured.

In their August 4, 2017 letter to the CEJA on this issue, the Supportive Care Coalition, of whom CHA is a member, lays out the values that drive our efforts to ensure compassionate, holistic care for those at the end of life, "We believe the inherent dignity of the human person must be respected and protected regardless of a person's diagnosis, social economic status, culture, or religious affiliation from birth to natural death. We believe in patient non-abandonment and an explicit commitment to accompany others in the midst of their suffering, especially when they are tempted to see their own lives as diminished in value or meaning. We seek to live out our convictions through providing quality palliative care services to ensure the most humane, comprehensive and compassionate care for those in the final stages of life."

Again, CHA supports the AMA's current opposition to physician assisted suicide and urges the AMA to continue their commitment to patients, their loved ones, and the professionals who care for them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Rodgers
Senior Vice President, Advocacy & Public Policy

Attachment: August 4, 2017 Supportive Care Coalition letter to the AMA's Committee on Ethical and Judicial Affairs re PAS

August 4, 2017

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Archdiocese of
Boston

Ascension
Health

Avera

Bon Secours
Health
System, Inc.

Carmelite
Sisters for
the Aged and
Infirm

Catholic
Health
Association of
the United
States

Catholic
Health
Initiatives

Franciscan
Missionaries
of
Our Lady
Health
System, Inc.

Hospital
Sisters
Health System

Mercy

OSF
HealthCare

PeaceHealth

Presence
Health

Providence
St. Joseph

Sisters of
Charity
Health System

SSM Health

Members of the Committee on Ethical and Judicial Affairs,

Since 1994, the Supportive Care Coalition has been a national voice for advancing high quality, accessible palliative care services across Catholic health care in the United States. Comprised of 16 Catholic organizations with health care services in over 40 states, the coalition advocates for a society in which all persons living with or affected by chronic or life-threatening medical conditions receive compassionate, holistic, coordinated care that includes relief of pain, suffering and other symptoms from the time of diagnosis to natural death.

With the American Medical Association, we affirm that the task of medicine is to care even when it cannot cure. We believe the inherent dignity of the human person must be respected and protected regardless of a person's diagnosis, social economic status, culture, or religious affiliation from birth to natural death. We believe in patient non-abandonment and an explicit commitment to accompany others in the midst of their suffering, especially when they are tempted to see their own lives as diminished in value or meaning. We seek to live out our convictions through providing quality palliative care services to ensure the most humane, comprehensive and compassionate care for those in the final stages of life.

The Supportive Care Coalition opposes public policy that advances the legalization of physician-assisted suicide for the following reasons:

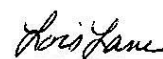
- Requests for physician assisted suicide are frequently motivated by fear of pain, diminishment, becoming a burden to others, or losing autonomy. Such fears can lead one to move too readily and unnecessarily to the option of physician assisted suicide.
- Far too often people who are terminally ill experience unrelieved physical, psycho-social and spiritual distress. Persistent poor quality of care during life threatening illness and at the end of life can be a major reason for requests for physician assisted suicide and its legalization.
- Endorsing physician assisted suicide as public policy may adversely affect and endanger vulnerable populations including those with mental health problems, chronic disease, physically or intellectually challenged; the young; and the frail elderly.
- Proponents of the legalization of physician assisted suicide refer to it as a private choice, a personal matter of self-determination to be accepted by the rest of society. However, physician assisted suicide is not simply a personal matter of self-determination. It is in fact a social act, involving others beyond the patient and requiring government oversight.
- There are limits to personal autonomy and physician assisted suicide can legitimately be overridden by other compelling interests, foremost, the preservation of human life.
- Physician assisted suicide is incompatible with the ethical traditions and goals of health professionals (physicians and nurses) and their covenant with society.
- The moral, professional and legal challenge should not revolve around the legalization of physician assisted suicide, but be directed at reversing the despair that may be associated with the final stages of life and mitigating the fear of loss of control.

The Supportive Care Coalition applauds the AMA's current opposition to physician assisted suicide and urges the AMA to continue their commitment to patients, their loved ones, and the professionals who care for them.

Sincerely,



Denise Hess
Executive Director



Lois Lane
Chair Elect, Board of Directors