



ONA Position Statement: Assisted Suicide

Date: November 2015

Statement of ONA Position

While it is illegal for anyone to administer medications to patients who are participating in assisted suicide, a nurse may be present when a qualified patient takes the prescribed medication to end his or her life in a humane and dignified manner (ORS 127.885 s.4.01). Nurses should be familiar with ODDA which delineates the process a patient must take if they decided to end their own life. The ODDA also delineates the legal authority of physicians and pharmacists in providing care and support to the patient.

ONA remains committed to the following tenets:

- Patients receive care that is of the highest quality;
- Patients have access to information related to their health status and available options for treatment; including information about potential impact of declination to exercise those options; and
- Patient self-determination and involvement in all aspects of care planning activities.

Purpose

Oregon voters approved the Oregon Death with Dignity Act (ODDA) found at: <https://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Pages/ors.aspx> in November 1994. This law allows for capable adult Oregonians (see definitions) with a life expectancy of six months or less to request a prescription for life-ending medications from their physician. The Act requires a second opinion from a consulting physician, a written request from the patient and a 15-day waiting period prior to receiving the prescription. It requires that the person be fully informed about “feasible alternatives including but not limited to, comfort care, hospice, and pain control,” as well as diagnosis, prognosis, risks and results. A request can be canceled at any time. Any physician or other health care provider can refuse to participate. The law does not authorize lethal injection or euthanasia (see definitions).

Oregon nurses have a proud history of supporting access to individualized and self-determined health care (ANA Code of Ethics, 2015). Nurses have played a key role in caring for patients throughout life’s continuum and at the end of life. Nurses also play an important role in advocating and assisting patients with information and education about assisted suicide or referring them to an appropriate provider who can do so.

The purpose of this assisted suicide statement is to update the Oregon Nurse Association's (ONA) position to document the role of the registered nurse (RN) during care provision for those electing to utilize ODDA.

Definitions

Assisted Suicide: Suicide that is performed with the help of another person to end suffering from severe physical illness. (Merriman-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

Capable: ORS 127.800 s.1.01. (3) *Means that in the opinion of a court or in the opinion of the patient's attending physician or consulting physician, psychiatrist or psychologist, a patient has the ability to make and communicate health care decisions to health care providers, including communication through persons familiar with the patient's manner of communicating if those persons are available.* (Oregon Health Authority, 2015).

Euthanasia: The act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. (Merriman-Webster Dictionary, 2015).

References and Resources

American Nurses Association (2015). *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*. Silver Spring, Maryland: Nursesbooks.org.

American Nurses Association (April 2013). Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, and Aid in Dying. Retrieved April 15, 2015, from <http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/EthicsStandards/Ethics-Position-Statements/Euthanasia-Assisted-Suicide-and-Aid-in-Dying.pdf>

Death with Dignity Act. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2015, from <http://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Pages/index.aspx>

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Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary on-line. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

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Task Force to Improve the Care of Terminally-Ill Oregonians. (2008). *The Oregon Death with Dignity Act: A guidebook for health care professionals*. (Convened by the Center for Ethics in Health Care, Oregon Health and Science University.) Retrieved from <http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/education/continuing-education/center-for-ethics/ethics-outrreach/upload/Oregon-Death-with-Dignity-Act-Guidebook.pdf>