



PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE (PAS)

Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) is NOT about removing life support or “pulling the plug.” Medical professionals and the courts recognize that the removal of artificial life support is not assisted suicide.

PAS is when a doctor prescribes a drug that a patient takes for the sole purpose of causing their own death.

PAS is legal in Oregon (1997), Washington (2008), Montana (2009), Vermont (2014) and California (2015), with ongoing litigation in New Mexico, New York, and Tennessee. PAS is also allowed in Switzerland (1942), the Netherlands (2002), Belgium (2002), Luxembourg (2009), and Canada (2015).

CONCERNS:

Suicide Contagion

- Nationwide, suicides have increased 6.3% since the legalization of PAS.¹
- In Oregon, PAS has increased from 16 per year in 1998, to 105 per year in 2014.
- By 2010 the rate of all suicides in Oregon had grown to 41% higher than the national average.²
- As of 2014 a total of 859 patients in Oregon have died through PAS.³

Safeguards Have Proven To Be Inadequate

- There is little or no counseling for the depressed or mentally ill in Oregon who are seeking PAS. Only 3 of the 105 patients who died by assisted suicide during 2014 were referred for formal psychiatric or psychological evaluation. Only 47 total have been referred since 1998. (5.5%)⁴
- “Doctor shopping gets around any safeguards.”⁵

It's Not About Pain. In Oregon, the most frequently mentioned end-of-life concerns were:

- Loss of autonomy - 91.4%
- Decreasing ability to participate in activities that made life enjoyable - 86.7%
- Loss of dignity - 71.4%
- Only 24.7% mentioned inadequate pain control or concern about it.⁶

Impact upon Doctors

- 58% of Doctors experienced feelings of discomfort following their most recent case of assisted suicide. 40% experienced “burdensome” feelings.⁷
- PAS inhibits the progress of medical advances, and “tends to result in fewer efforts by the doctor to find a solution to the patient’s distress.”⁸
- Predicting end of life is difficult. “Recognition of the final phase of life is notoriously difficult to diagnose, and errors in prognostication are common.”⁹

Impact upon Family Members

- Family members may feel relief at first, but have regrets later. A Swiss study showed about 20% of respondents experienced full or partial post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to the loss of their loved one through assisted suicide.¹⁰

Financial Issues

- Oregon Medicaid (Oregon Health Plan) covers PAS, but not “the costs for curative or local medical treatment for patients with cancer with a less than 5% chance of living 5 years, even when that treatment can prolong valuable life.”¹¹

STATEMENTS:

U.S. Surgeon General *“Suicide Contagion is Real. Those who die by suicide are far from the only ones affected by this tragedy. Suicide exacts a heavy toll on those left behind as well. For every American who dies by suicide, many others attempt suicide, and many more suffer the despair that leads them to consider taking their own life.”*¹²

Maggie Karner (had the same type of brain cancer as Brittney Maynard) *“I get strength and comfort from the knowledge that nobody is going to give up on me. I have the firm support of the state and my fellow citizens in my desire to live - no matter the cost or burden. If that were to change, the tiny knowledge that I might be straining my family, friends, doctors, or community resources would be a heavy burden. The constant “option” for suicide would wear at my resolve and I fear, become an unspoken “duty” for me and others.”*

Dawn Henslee (whose mother ended her own life through PAS) *“[it was] the most horrifying experience that I've ever been through. For months, we didn't have time to grieve properly -- and people didn't treat us like we were grieving, either. The guy who came to pick up the hospital bed that mother had used, told us: 'Normally, I would say I'm sorry, but I guess this is what she wanted.' He didn't think this was a loss for us.”*¹³

Prominent U of U Brain Surgeon *“Over my 30 years of practice, I have learned that when doctors try to predict the future, they're always wrong.”*

Roger Kiska International Senior Counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF): *“People suffering from depression need compassion, love and sound treatment, not a prescription for death.”*

¹ Jones, Paton, 2015, “How Does Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide Affect Rates of Suicide?” Southern Medical Journal <http://sma.org/southern-medical-journal/article/how-does-legalization-of-physician-assisted-suicide-affect-rates-of-suicide/>

² Suicides in Oregon: Trends and Risk Factors -2012 Report- <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/amh/CSAC%20Meeting%20Shedule/Suicide-in-Oregon-report.pdf>

³ Oregon's Death with Dignity Act -- 2014 <https://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Documents/year17.pdf> p. 1

⁴ Oregon Public Health Division, “Oregon's Death with Dignity Act - 2014” <https://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Documents/year17.pdf> pp. 2, 5

⁵ Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, <http://dredf.org/public-policy/assisted-suicide/some-oregon-assisted-suicide-abuses-and-complications/>

⁶ Oregon Public Health Division, “Oregon's Death with Dignity Act - 2014” <https://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Documents/year17.pdf> pp. 2, 5

⁷ Stevens, 2009 “Doctors are Negatively Affected by Assisting in Assisted Suicide” <http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/ovic/ViewpointsDetailsPage/DocumentToolsPortletWindow?displayGroupName=Viewpoints&jsid=1ec0f098542654f15ecd0b2f9dea6345&action=2&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CEJ3010035297&u=gotitans&zid=83992190c637f223136b48e057eb14ea>

⁸ Physicians for Compassionate Care Education Foundation <http://www.pccef.org/whoweare/faqs.htm>

⁹ Glare, 2008 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5457601_Predicting_survival_in_patients_with_advanced_cancer

¹⁰ Wagner, Muller, Maercker, 2010, “Death by request in Switzerland: Posttraumatic stress disorder and complicated grief after witnessing assisted suicide” https://www.researchgate.net/publication/49831341_Death_by_request_in_Switzerland_Posttraumatic_stress_disorder_and_complicated_grief_after_witnessing_assisted_suicide

¹¹ Physicians for Compassionate Care Education Foundation <http://www.pccef.org/articles/art42UofO.htm>

¹² 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action: A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General and of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. Preface from the Surgeon General <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109919/>

¹³ Impact of Euthanasia on the Family <http://www.life.org.nz/euthanasia/euthanasiakeyissues/impact-on-family/>