

AMA Code of Medical Ethics

Opinion 5.7 Physician-Assisted Suicide

Physician-assisted suicide occurs when a physician facilitates a patient's death by providing the necessary means and/or information to enable the patient to perform the life-ending act (e.g., the physician provides sleeping pills and information about the lethal dose, while aware that the patient may commit suicide).

It is understandable, though tragic, that some patients in extreme duress—such as those suffering from a terminal, painful, debilitating illness—may come to decide that death is preferable to life. However, permitting physicians to engage in assisted suicide would ultimately cause more harm than good.

Physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would pose serious societal risks.

Instead of engaging in assisted suicide, physicians must aggressively respond to the needs of patients at the end of life. Physicians:

- (a) Should not abandon a patient once it is determined that cure is impossible.
- (b) Must respect patient autonomy.
- (c) Must provide good communication and emotional support.
- (d) Must provide appropriate comfort care and adequate pain control.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, VI

Note

Guidance in the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics* encompasses the irreducible moral tension at stake for physicians with respect to participating in assisted suicide. The AMA's position is not one of neutrality and Opinion 5.7 articulates the AMA's opposition to physician-assisted suicide. However, individual physicians who, after due moral consideration, exercise their conscience in accordance with [Opinion 1.1.7](#) and legally engage in the practice of physician-assisted suicide will not have acted in violation of the *Code*.

Thoughtful, morally admirable individuals hold diverging yet deeply held and well-considered perspectives about physician-assisted suicide. Nonetheless, at the core of public and professional debate about physician-assisted suicide is the conviction that, within the bounds of ethical norms, the relief of suffering is a central goal of medicine, particularly at the end of life. Supporters and opponents share a fundamental commitment to values of care, compassion, respect, and dignity; they diverge in drawing different moral conclusions from those underlying values in equally good faith.