

Euthanasia

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 5.8

Euthanasia is the administration of a lethal agent by another person to a patient for the purpose of relieving the patient's intolerable and incurable suffering.

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 euthanasia would ultimately cause more harm than good.

Euthanasia is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would pose serious societal risks. Euthanasia could readily be extended to incompetent patients and other vulnerable populations.

The involvement of physicians in euthanasia heightens the significance of its ethical prohibition. The physician who performs euthanasia assumes unique responsibility for the act of ending the patient's life.

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

1. Should not abandon a patient once it is determined that a cure is impossible.
2. Must respect patient autonomy.
3. Must provide good communication and emotional support.
4. Must provide appropriate comfort care and adequate pain control.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: I, IV

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Code of Medical Ethics: Caring for Patients at the End of Life



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