

Oncology Nursing Society Position on the Nurse's Responsibility to Patients Requesting Assistance in Hastening Death

Requests for assistance in hastening death are not uncommon for healthcare professionals treating patients with advanced cancer and other life-limiting illnesses. Nurses may encounter agonizing clinical situations and experience personal and professional tension and ambiguity surrounding a patient's request for hastening death. Currently, withholding or withdrawing treatment, the use of sedation to relieve intractable distress in the terminally ill, and withholding nutrition and hydration are legally sanctioned.

It is the position of the Oncology Nursing Society that efforts to improve compassionate, evidence-based care for the dying and dialogues on any and all ethical dilemmas should continue.

This includes

- Understanding that physical suffering may not always be alleviated, and only a dying individual can judge what a tolerable or acceptable level of personal suffering is
- Refraining from the use of judgmental language in the presence of patients, family members, significant others, and professional colleagues when hastened death is requested
- Recognizing that nurses have the right, on moral and ethical grounds, to refuse to be involved in the care of patients who choose hastened death as a course of action.

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