

The National Academies of
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE
Board on Health Sciences Policy

Physician-Assisted Death: Scanning the Landscape and Potential Approaches
A Workshop

Background and Objectives

The question of whether and under what circumstances terminally ill patients can access life-ending medications with the aid of a physician is receiving increasing attention as a matter of public opinion and of public policy. Ethicists, clinicians, patients and their families debate whether physician-assisted death ought to be a legal option for patients. While public opinion is divided, and public policy debates include moral, ethical, and policy considerations, a demand for physician-assisted death persists among some patients, and the inconsistent legal terrain leaves a number of questions and challenges for health care providers to navigate when presented with these patients.

Statement of Task

The Board on Health Sciences Policy of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will convene an ad hoc committee to plan a workshop that will explore current practices and challenges associated with physician-assisted death, and highlight potential approaches for addressing those challenges. The workshop will address the following questions:

- What is known empirically about the access to and practice of physician-assisted death in the U.S. and in other countries?
- In states where it is legal, what is known about who accesses it and the impact the practice has on the patient and family experience of death? What is known about whether legal safeguards are observed? What is known about whether concerns about vulnerable populations have been realized when it is practiced?
- In states where it is not legal, what is known about the current practice of physician-assisted death and what patients are accessing it? Is its practice accompanied by safeguards, if any, and how do such safeguards compare with safeguards enacted in states where it is legalized?
- What are the gaps in empirical data about the practice of physician-assisted death in the U.S.?

- How do the data collected in the U.S. compare with the data collection in countries like the Netherlands, which have more extensive reporting and data collection?
- What are potential approaches for physicians:
 - Who practice in a state where it is legal but are personally opposed to physician-assisted death?
 - Who receive a request for access but the situation does not adhere to the applicable state's legal framework?
 - Who receive a request for access when the practice is legal in nearby states but not in the state of practice?
- What is known about how palliative care and hospice services have incorporated the practice of physician-assisted death in states where it is legal?

Timeline

- Workshop to be held February 12–13, 2018
- *Proceedings of a Workshop* anticipated to be released in Q2 2018

Workshop Sponsor

The Greenwall Foundation

Planning Committee

Jim Childress, University of Virginia (*chair*)
Anthony Back, University of Washington
Nancy Berlinger, The Hastings Center
Linda Ganzini, Oregon Health and Sciences University
Scott Halpern, University of Pennsylvania
Barbara Jones, University of Texas, Austin
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