



Position statement on physician-assisted suicide

Hospice UK has **no collective view** regarding the issue of whether the law should change to allow physician-assisted suicide. This is on the basis that the organisation represents over 220 member organisations, most of whom have not yet stated a clear position regarding this matter. It is different from a neutral position, which may imply an organisational perspective that has no interest in the outcome of the debate.

The whole ethos of hospice and palliative care, as defined by the World Health Organization, is that it “*intends neither to hasten nor postpone death*”¹. This philosophy is a cornerstone of hospice care in the UK.

If there were to be a change in the law relating to physician-assisted suicide in any of the four countries of the UK, Hospice UK believes that very careful consideration would need to be given to the effect it would have on patients and those important to them, services, staff and volunteers.

Recommendations

- Improving access to hospice and palliative care services should be a priority for governments around the UK. Governments across the UK should ensure public funding is available to increase the availability of palliative care, whether provided by the NHS, social care services, national organisations, or charitable hospices.
- All patients and those important to them should be made aware of options for hospice and palliative care, and should be offered an assessment of their individual needs to make sure that appropriate palliative care is being provided.
- There is an urgent need to dispel the myths about the use of opioids and other medications to manage pain, and to encourage those prescribing for terminally ill and dying patients to consult with palliative care experts.
- Hospices, and other providers, should consider their role in improving professional and public understanding of symptom management, and ways in which psychosocial distress in patients and those important to them can be addressed.

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¹ World Health Organization definition of palliative care <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/>