



## **Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: Position Statement Nga Whaea Atawhai**

Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand affirm all human life as being of worth and having intrinsic dignity. Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide in any form are contrary to the ethics and philosophy of care adhered to by our Mercy Health Care facilities. We oppose any change to New Zealand law which would provide for the legalisation of assisted dying.

Good end of life care, be it aged care, palliative or hospice care, aims to enable people to live fully and comfortably to the natural end of their lives and to die in peace and dignity. Rather than legislating to enable foreshortening of the lives of those who are dying, we advocate for increased funding to provide accessible, affordable palliative and hospice care to all who need these services.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide as life-ending practices are not health procedures. Such practices violate health care ethics and are antithetical to the practice of palliative care. Palliative care

- affirms life and regards death as a normal process
- intends to neither hasten nor postpone death
- provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms

(Ministry of Health, 2001; World Health Organisation, 2002).

Patients, however, have the right to refuse or request withdrawal of life prolonging treatments such as CPR, or the administration of medically assisted nutrition and / or hydration. Withholding or withdrawing of treatment that is non-beneficial or burdensome to a patient at end of life does not constitute euthanasia (ANZSPM, 2017).

Mercy Health Care facilities remain committed to providing best-practice, holistic care for their patients and their families as they face the difficulties presented by life-threatening illnesses.

### **Definitions**

Terminology used to describe assisted death is not always clearly understood, therefore the following definitions are included for clarification.

#### **Euthanasia**

Euthanasia is defined as “the deliberate ending of another person’s life at his or her request. ... If someone other than the person who dies performs the last act, euthanasia has occurred” (Palliative Care Australia, 2011; Palliative Care Council of New Zealand, 2013).

#### **Physician Assisted Suicide**

Physician assisted suicide (PAS) is defined as occurring if: “A doctor intentionally helps a person to commit suicide by providing drugs (or other means) for self-administration, at the person’s voluntary request. If the person who dies performs the last act, physician assisted suicide has occurred” (Palliative Care Council of New Zealand, 2013).

### **References**

Australia and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (2017). *ANZSPM Position Statement on the Practice of Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide*. Retrieved from <http://www.anzspm.org.au/c/anzspm?a=da&did=1005077>

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World Health Organisation. (2002). *Palliative care is an essential part of cancer control*. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/en/>.