

PRESS RELEASE - March 9, 2006

OREGON'S ASSISTED SUICIDE LAW: THE "MEDICAL KILLING" OF VULNERABLE PATIENTS CONTINUES.

Twelve years ago, Oregon voters legalized the practice of doctor-assisted suicide. Assisted suicide does nothing to improve health care at end of life. What the law actually does is protect doctors from peer review and from prosecution for medical killing. The Oregon Assisted Suicide law also limits patients' and families' ability to have the proper recourse in the case of malpractice.

Physicians for Compassionate Care Education Foundation (PCCEF) continues to express, on behalf of all its members, profound grief for those vulnerable individuals frightened into committing assisted suicide. We note the degradation of patient trust and the negative impact on the patient-physician relationships and role of the medical profession in our state.

As in the past, this year's report released today by the Oregon Department of Human Services contains several areas of concern.

- Only 2 patients of the 38 Oregonians who were "assisted" in 2005 had a referral for psychiatric evaluation. Suicidal ideation is a symptom of depression, and this raises concern that depressed patients are being medically killed in Oregon.
- One patient in 2005 made the first request for assisted suicide 1009 days (almost 3 years) prior to death, that patient was obviously not terminal when the request was made.
- Thirty-four patients used pentobarbital, which is only available in a liquid form designed for intravenous or intramuscular use; it is not designed for oral use, which raises concern about how this drug is being used in Oregon.

PCCEF continues to affirm the ethic that human life has inherent value, and that doctor-assisted suicide does the following:

- Undermines trust in the patient-physician relationship
- Alters the role of the physician in society, from the traditional one of healer to executioner.
- Endangers the value that society places on life, specifically for those who are most vulnerable Physicians for Compassionate Care and its members will continue to assist individual patients and their families to access excellent palliative care at the end of life.