

PRESS RELEASE--January 27, 2011

Physician-Assisted Suicides in Oregon in 2010 – Even More Unknown Information

The annual report from the Oregon Public Health Division (OPHD) regarding physician-assisted suicides in 2010 has been released this month, and contains information received by them as of January 7, 2011. This release of information is two months earlier in the year than for prior years' reports. Because of the hastiness in releasing the report, they acknowledge that not all information for 2010 has been received by them.

PCCEF is concerned with multiple areas of the OPHD report on Oregon assisted suicides for the 2010 year.

- The report is incomplete. Specifically, they have not received information on 15 patients for whom prescriptions were written in 2010.
- The report acknowledges 65 individuals who died from physician-assisted suicide in 2010, yet concedes there may be others who have died in 2010 for whom they have not received information.
- Not all who attempt to take the medication will die. Overdoses failed to cause two individuals to die. One regained consciousness within 24 hours and died of the underlying illness five days later. Another gained consciousness 3 ½ days after ingestion and died of the underlying illness three months later. Vomiting was reported in both people. These are not easy drugs to take, and they are very bitter and foul-tasting drugs. The report fails to detail why these two people chose not to repeat an overdose. Perhaps they found the experience less pleasant than the promoters led them to believe.
- Only one of the 65 had a psychiatric or psychological referral. OHSU researchers in 2008 reported that 25% of patients requesting assisted suicide were considered to be depressed. There continues to be no protection for depressed patients in Oregon.
- The report has far more unknown information than has previously been reported:

Category

Health-care provider present when medication was ingested

Complications

Emergency Medical Services called

Minutes between ingestion & unconsciousness

Minutes between ingestion & death

Unknown Information

for 45 of 65 patients

for 37 of 65 patients

for 37 of 65 patients

for 33 of 65 patients

for 33 of 65 patients

When such a substantial proportion of important information is unknown, how are Oregonians to know what is really happening with assisted suicides in the state?

Physicians for Compassionate Care Education Foundation promotes the ethic that all human life has inherent value and that physician-assisted suicide:

- Undermines trust in the patient-physician relationship.
- Changes the societal role of the physician from healing to medical killing.

- Endangers the value that society places on life, specifically for those who are most vulnerable, those who are frail, elderly, and at the end of life.