

SB 116

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Rocky Mountain Health Network
Sisters of Charity Leavenworth Montana Care Sites:
St Vincent Healthcare, Billings
St. James Healthcare, Butte
Holy Rosary Healthcare, Miles City

Position Statement on Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS)

The care of the sick and dying involves an ancient Sacred Trust among the physicians, the organizations in which they work, and the patients. The highest ethical and moral standards are fundamental tenets in this Sacred Trust. From time to time providers have found it necessary to provide documentation of the principles involved. We site four examples of this documentation:

1. The Hippocratic Oath. This oath is historically taken by physicians swearing to practice medicine ethically. The Oath specifically addresses the issue of a physician's involvement in a patient's death. The following are excerpts from first the original oath, and second, a classic translation of the Oath:

"I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I advise such an plan, and similarly I will not give a woman a pessary to cause and abortion. But I will preserve the purity of my life and arts."

"I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and by art."

2. Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services (ERD); (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). ERD Part Five, Number 60 states that "euthanasia is an action or omission that of itself or by intention causes death in order to alleviate suffering. Catholic health care institutions may never condone or participate in euthanasia or assisted suicide in any way. Dying patients who request euthanasia should receive loving care, psychological and spiritual support, and appropriate remedies for pain and other symptoms so that they can live with dignity until the time of natural death." It is from this doctrine that we support the principles of palliative care.
3. Code of Medical Ethics (American Medical Association): E-2.211 Physician-Assisted Suicide. "Physician-assisted suicide occurs when a physician facilitates a patient's death by providing the necessary means and/or information to enable the patient to perform the life-ending act....Physician-assisted suicide is

fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would pose serious societal risks.”

4. At the most recent national meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Bishops agreed to the preparation of a policy statement specifically on assisted suicide, which will be debated and voted upon in June of 2011. Bishop Thomas of Helena and Bishop Warfel of Great Falls and Billings spoke in favor of the policy statement which would amplify ERD 60, and oppose physician assisted suicide.

In keeping with the spirit of these documents, we strongly oppose Physician Assisted Suicide, and strongly support the passage of SB116 which if enacted would prohibit physician assisted suicide.

Respectfully submitted,



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On behalf of St. Vincent Healthcare, St. James Healthcare, and Holy Rosary Healthcare, and Rocky Mountain Health Network (a Provider Hospital Organization of 535 members)

February 9, 2011
Montana State Capitol