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I am board certified in Pulmonary Disease and Internal Medicine. I have practiced Critical Care and Pulmonary Medicine in Great Falls since 1982 and have been the Medical Director of Critical Services at Montana Deaconess Hospital and Benefis Healthcare for some 15 of those years.

I have had the privilege of caring for hundreds of patients in the final stage of their lives, and have seen many of them make the transition from life to death. Compassionate medical care dictates that the physician provide relief of suffering, which includes physical and emotional distress. This is best done through a well-planned palliative care or hospice program, using appropriate medications and psycho-social interactions to minimize symptoms and allow natural death to occur.

One of the basic tenets of medical education is "first, do no harm". A guiding ethical principal is to use medications in palliative care or hospice situations with the intent of relieving symptoms and allowing death to come; that is far different than giving medications with the express intent of causing a patients death. The latter is a violation of the Hippocratic Oath that many of us took at medical school graduation.

Expecting, or demanding the physician to actively aid a patient's death would forever alter the relationship of trust historically established and maintained between physician and patient. Furthermore, it is impossible for even experienced physicians to accurately predict an expected length of life for any disease process. All of us have seen patients do much better than originally expected, with a quality of life acceptable to them.

I am strongly against Physician Assisted Suicide in Montana and request your support for the Hinkle Senate bill.

Richard D Blevins, MD. Big Sky Pulmonary and Critical Care Associates, Great Falls, MT.