

World Medical Association Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide

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Instances of physician-assisted suicide have recently become the focus of public attention. These instances involve the use of a machine, invented by the physician who instructs the individual in its use. The individual thereby is assisted in committing suicide. In other instances the physician has provided medication to the individual with information as to the amount of dosage that would be lethal. The individual is thereby provided with the means for committing suicide. To be sure, the individuals involved were seriously ill, perhaps even terminally ill, and were wracked with pain. Furthermore, the individuals were apparently competent and made their own decision to commit suicide. Patients contemplating suicide are frequently expressing the depression that accompanies terminal illness.

Physician-assisted suicide, like euthanasia, is unethical and must be condemned by the medical profession. Where the assistance of the physician is intentionally and deliberately directed at enabling an individual to end his or her own life, the physician acts unethically. However the right to decline medical treatment is a basic right of the patient and the physician does not act unethically even if respecting such a wish results in the death of the patient.