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Doctors Say "NO" to Physician Assisted Suicide

Indianapolis, IN – Sept 25, 2016 – Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA) voted today to formalize its opposition to Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS).

At the annual ISMA convention, among the many resolutions discussed, two opposing resolutions were debated advocating the ISMA adopt a position either supporting or opposing PAS. There was passionate debate with the vast majority of physicians who testified strongly recommending opposing any attempt to legalize PAS in Indiana. There were many first time conference attendees who came specifically to testify against PAS. This was by far the most debated resolution discussed and the meeting went well over the scheduled time due to the many physicians that wanted to speak out against PAS.

The American Medical Association (AMA) is currently studying this issue on a national level since it has been legalized in Oregon (1994), Washington (2008) Vermont (2013), California (2015), and by statute and by court decision in Montana (2009).

Arguments stated in favor of PAS included:

- PAS would decrease healthcare costs at the end of life
- It would help patients who commit suicide to die in a more peaceful manner
- Other states have legalized it and some patients would like it here in Indiana

Arguments stated opposing PAS included:

- Medical professionals should focus on providing care and comfort to patients – NOT becoming a source of lethal drugs. Patients would not want their doctor to have this power and suggest suicide to them as an "option."
- Doctors will be put in a conflict of interest with challenging patients. If a physician does not wish to continue treating a patient, this would be a safe harbor for physicians to help kill their difficult patients.
- Will the government and insurance companies do the right thing – pay for treatment costing thousands of dollars – or the cheap thing – pay for lethal drugs costing hundreds of dollars?
- Patients in Oregon have received letters from insurance companies refusing to pay for chemo but suggesting PAS.
- Everyone knows someone who has been misdiagnosed or outlived a terminal diagnosis.
- Diabetes is considered a "terminal disease" that would qualify for PAS in Oregon.
- Wanting to die because of depression is treatable. Millions of people are living proof.
- Everyone agrees that dying in pain is unacceptable, however nearly all pain is now treatable. A patient in pain should find a new doctor.

- Oregon is proof that general suicides rise dramatically once assisted suicide is promoted as a “good.”
- One could have a family member die from taking lethal drugs and would not know about it until he/she is dead because no family notification is required in advance.
- Assisted suicide is a recipe for elder and disability abuse because it can put lethal drugs in the hands of abusers.
- A relative who is an heir to the patient’s estate or an abusive caregiver can pick up the lethal drugs and administer them without the patient’s knowledge or consent. There is no oversight and no witnesses are required once the lethal drugs leave the pharmacy.
- PAS is against the Muslim faith as well as the Jewish, Christian, and Hindu faith as well as many other faith traditions.
- For 2500 years physicians have professed the “Hippocratic Oath” which explicitly forbade PAS, and continue to hold as the first tenant of medical ethics, “primum non nocere” (first, do no harm)
- This would send the message to disabled and aged patients that their lives are not worth living.
- Any safeguards set up to protect vulnerable patients from coercion to submit to PAS will erode as seen in the countries where this has been practiced for 30 years. Half of PAS nurses in those countries admit to euthanizing a patient without consent.