

## Aid in Dying Language Matters

Words matter. Aid in dying is the term now widely accepted in law and medicine to describe the practice of a physician prescribing medication to a terminally ill, mentally competent patient who may choose to ingest it to end suffering they find unbearable, and achieve a peaceful death. The American Public Health Association and the American Medical Women's Association have accepted this term.

It is inappropriate and inaccurate to use the value laden, pejorative terms "assisted suicide" or "physician assisted suicide" to describe aid in dying. Opponents of the practice use this biased terminology to equate aid in dying with criminal acts, and imply a social stigma.

Those who choose aid in dying do not want to die, and they are not suicidal. They want to live, but will soon be dead from terminal illnesses. What is causing their deaths is their disease. Dying patients reject the terms "assisted suicide" and "suicide" as insulting and derogatory. In states where aid in dying is permitted by statute, Oregon, Washington and Vermont, these terms are specifically rejected, and it is explicitly recognized that actions comporting with the laws do not constitute "suicide" or "assisted suicide." Similarly, in Montana and New Mexico, which permit the practice by court decision, the courts have recognized a right to "aid in dying," not "assisted suicide".

Medical, health policy and mental health professionals recognize that the terms "suicide" and "assisted suicide" are inaccurate, biased and pejorative in this context. Thus, mainstream relevant and respected organizations have rejected the term "assisted suicide." These include the American Public Health Association, American Medical Women's Association, American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, the American College of Legal Medicine and the American Medical Students Association. They have variously stated that "suicide" terminology is "emotionally charged," "inaccurate and inappropriate," and "unfairly colors the issue."

Aid in dying is the accepted accurate and value neutral term. It should be used in all communications by the media and others, in media stories and in headlines, on the issue to avoid what might appear to be media bias.

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