



Hawaii Society of Clinical Oncology (HSCO) Statement on Medical Aid in Dying (MAID)

In April 2018, the Hawaii State Legislature passed the “Our Care, Our Choice Act” which permits physicians to provide prescriptions to qualified patients to end their life. This legislation is similar to other states that have legalized “Medical Aid in Dying” (MAID). Prior to this, the Hawaii Society of Clinical Oncology (HSCO) has never had any policy regarding MAID. There is no guidance or recommendation for members in how to deal with the ethical and clinical issues surrounding this dramatic additional option to end of life (EOL) care for cancer patients in Hawaii. We believe it is essential that HSCO membership have a clear view of the issue because oncologists deal with terminally ill cancer patients across the state.

With MAID policy being debated in the state of Hawaii for the past two decades, we at HSCO believe education and conversation surrounding this policy should continue. The Hawaii legislature found that any MAID legislation would need to include the following patient protections:

- “(1) Confirmation by two health care providers of the patient's diagnoses, prognosis, and medical competence, and the voluntariness of the patient's request;
- (2) Two oral requests from the patient, separated by not less than fifteen days, and one signed written request that is witnessed by two people, one of whom must be unrelated to the patient;
- (3) An additional waiting period between the written request and the writing of the prescription; and
- (4) The creation of strict criminal penalties for any person who:
 - (A) Tamper with a person's request for a prescription pursuant to this Act; or
 - (B) Coerces a person with a terminal illness to request a prescription.”

Recognizing that principled physicians disagree about the ethics of MAID, HSCO is committed to protecting its members' freedom to decide whether to participate in medical aid in dying according to their own values and beliefs. This decision should be between the physician and their patient. HSCO recognizes that medical aid in dying is a legal option that should be made in the context of the physician-patient relationship.

HSCO is actively engaged in promoting initiatives that assure all dying patients in the state of Hawaii receive good, comprehensive palliative care. This includes: the use of state-of-the-art pain and symptom control; the provision of secure and supportive environments through hospice; and the freedom of the patient to choose or refuse all medical treatment.

All health care practitioners must aggressively respond to the needs of patients at the end of life. Patients should not be abandoned once it is determined that cure is impossible. Multidisciplinary interventions should be sought including specialty consultation, hospice care, pastoral support, family counseling, and other modalities. Patients near the end of life have special needs and should continue to receive emotional support, good communication, comfort care and adequate pain control. Their autonomy must always be respected.

Even using all the tools at hand to care for pain and suffering, a small number of patients still suffer. Each of these patients is unique; each one will challenge the caregiver's skills to the extreme; each one's care should be highly individualized and decided in private amongst the patient, physician and family.