

Recommendations for Nurses, Social Workers, and Others Washington Death With Dignity Act

Although social workers, nurses, and others have no legal role in the Washington Death With Dignity Act (DWDA) process, they may still have a profound impact. Explaining the details of the DWDA often falls to the support staff. It is important that patients are fully educated and their needs are being met.

Only Washington State licensed MDs and DOs; psychologists and psychiatrists (when referred to by physicians); and pharmacists who elect to participate play a legal role in the DWDA.

If a patient asks to use the DWDA, you should ensure that the patient:

- Understands your employer's policies about the DWDA.
- Has accurate information about the DWDA and who qualifies.
- Has their pain and symptoms adequately managed (if this falls within your role).
- Is receiving hospice care. If not, provide a referral.
- Is not pursuing the DWDA due to circumstances that can be mitigated.
- Receives a referral to Compassion & Choices of Washington (C&C). C&C provides free client support services to educate patients about all their end-of-life options, provides assistance locating participating physicians and pharmacists, and provides a supportive presence at the time of death, if requested.

You can (if your employer's policies permit it):

- Assist the participating physician and pharmacist with required reporting.
- Provide a referral to a participating physician if the patient's physician declines to participate.
- Offer to help the patient talk to his or her family about this choice.
- Create an institutional process for responding to requests for the DWDA, such as designating a staff person who is the DWDA coordinator.
- Offer your presence at the time of death.
- Ask to be removed from the case if your personal beliefs conflict with the DWDA.

You should not:

- Press your own beliefs about dying or pain management on the patient.
- Assume that the patient is suicidal, depressed, or incompetent.
- Call a Chaplain in unless the patient requests one.

The DWDA does not authorize medical providers to prohibit staff from responding to a patient's request for information about the DWDA, including referring the patient to C&C. See RCW 70.245.190 at www.doh.wa.gov/dwda.

C&C's Director of Client Support is available to provide you with support. All contacts are strictly confidential.