

Chapter 19 Assignment: Physician Assisted Suicide

Physician assisted suicide or euthanasia is an ethical debate that comes up commonly in healthcare. But what is it? According to the ANA Position Statement in the OJIN (Online Journal of Issues in Nursing) published in 2019, "Euthanasia which is not legal in the United States, occurs when someone other than the patient administers medication in any form with the intention to hastening the patient's death." Should someone have the right to choose to die? More specifically is it within the doctors scope of practice to assist? What about nurses? Is it against our code of ethics to assist? We as healthcare providers duty to "do no harm." If we assist someone in their death, is that or is that not harming them? This line can be muddled. On the one end, the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses states "the nurse promotes, advocates for, and protects the rights, health and safety of the patient." If the patient wants to die because of a life altering illness, would it be in the best interest to advocate for our patient? We want to advocate for what the patient wants on a typical basis. In this situation, it would go against what we as nurses stand for. We also would have to put our own biases aside. It does not matter our personal thoughts and feelings but rather what is in the best interest of our patient.

On the other side of things the ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses also states, "The nurse has authority, accountability, and responsibility for nursing practice; makes decisions and takes action consistent with the obligation to promote health and provide optimal care". We as nurses also need to provide optimal care for our patients. Helping assist them in their death as ordered by a physician, in my opinion, is not doing that. That is harming a patient and reflects back in our duty to "do no harm". Some may believe that by doing nothing and allowing the patient to suffer would also go against "doing no harm". The ANA Position Statement from 2019 also states that "Euthanasia is inconsistent with the core commitments of the nursing profession and profoundly violates public trust."

This is something else we need to consider. Nurses as well as other healthcare professionals are supposed to be helping people and not hurting them. We have built an image in the public eye as good people and those promoting the health and well-being of others. As I have brought up previously. The harming of another would violate public trust. How would this be? Well to put this plainly, we killed someone. Would you trust a healthcare provider that you openly knew murdered someone regardless of the circumstances? The answer is no. Majority of the public would feel the same way. The "violation of public trust" as the ANA mentions would alter healthcare and those seeking out help in the future.

Reference:

Ojin homepage. OJIN. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://ojin.nursingworld.org/table-of-contents/volume-24-2019/number-3-september-2019/nurses-role-medical-aid-in-dying/#:~:text=Euthanasia%2C%20which%20is%20not%20legal,and%20profoundly%20violates%20public%20trust>.

American Nurses Association Code of ethics for nurses. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://nursing.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ANA-Code-of-Ethics-for-Nurses.pdf>