

Controversies over Physician-Assisted Death and Euthanasia

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Disclosures

- No financial conflicts
- Past bias: Former Chair of AAN Ethics, Law & Humanities Committee that published an AAN position paper in 1998 opposing neurologist participation in PAD and its legalization
- Current viewpoint: longstanding PAD legalization skeptic who has become increasingly tolerant and now is agnostic and ambivalent

Learning Objectives

- Be able to define physician-assisted death (PAD) and voluntary active euthanasia (VAE)
- Be able to distinguish PAS and VAE from refusal of life-sustaining therapy, palliative sedation, and voluntarily stopping eating and drinking
- Be able to state four reasons PAD and VAE can be viewed as immoral and four reasons why PAD and VAE can be viewed as morally acceptable
- Be able to explain how the legality of PAD and VAE varies among countries and is changing rapidly

Key Message

- Physician-assisted death (PAD) and voluntary active euthanasia (VAE) are life-ending acts that previously were unlawful in every jurisdiction but now are being legalized in many countries.
- There remains an unresolved ethical debate over the practices of PAD and VAE, and if medical societies should endorse their physicians to practice them.
- Demanding precision in the definitions, practices, and boundaries of PAD and VAE will help clarify the ethical and legal debates over them.

Selected References

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