



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Doctors who care for dying people are unwilling to participate in physician assisted suicide.

A survey of members of the Association for Palliative Medicine (APM) published today confirms continued opposition to physician assisted suicide.

The survey has shown that a majority of respondents (82%) do not support a change in the law on assisted suicide, confirming the a similar finding in a recent survey by the Royal College of Physicians in which 85% of Palliative physician members opposed any change in the law and 92% opposed physician assisted suicide.

The survey went on to ask "If Parliament decides to change the law in the UK to allow assisted suicide, should it be within routine medical practice or should its assessment, approval and implementation be entirely outside the sphere of medicine, for instance in the family court?" Eighty two percent responded it should be outside of medicine with only 5% responding it should be part of routine medical practice. Less than 4% of doctors who responded would be willing to participate fully in its implementation by assessing and deciding suitability, recommending to the court and prescribing lethal medication as envisaged by the Bill currently before parliament bringing into question the practicality of implementing such legislation if it were passed.

The full questions and answers were:

Do you think that the law in the UK should be amended to allow Assisted Suicide as proposed in Lord Falconer's bill?

Yes	12%	43
No	82%	298
Don't Know	6%	24

If Parliament decides to change the law in the UK to allow assisted suicide, should it be within routine medical practice or should its assessment, approval and implementation be entirely outside the sphere of medicine, for instance in the family court?

Part of routine medicine	5%	18
Outside medicine	82%	297
Don't Know	13%	47

Doctors currently licensed to practice:

If Assisted Suicide became legal in the UK in the current bill you would be able to limit your involvement to the level your conscience permitted. So would you personally be prepared to:

- a) Participate fully in its implementation by assessing and deciding suitability, recommending to the court and prescribing lethal medication?

Yes	4%	16
No	89%	320
Don't Know	7%	25

- b) Assist the court by preparing judgements to the court to support the court's decision (e.g. Assessment of capacity, fixed will, and degree of coercion)?

Yes	22%	79
No	62%	227
Don't Know	16%	58

c) Provide a court with factual information alone (e.g. diagnosis, extent of disease, involvement of palliative care services etc)?

Yes	71%	256
No	16%	57
Don't Know	13%	48

What impact do you think the passing of this bill, or similar one legalising assisted suicide, would have on the delivery of palliative care including the care given by Hospices?

Very Adverse	35%	128
Adverse	37%	135
Neutral	22%	80
Positive	4%	15
Very Positive	2%	3

The results build on those of other surveys of groups of doctors opinion which show that the majority of doctors are opposed to a change in the law to legalise assisted suicide and especially physician-assisted suicide. Furthermore that even amongst those who do support a change in the law a significant proportion do not think that medicine should be involved in the process, either the approval of requests or the implementation process and the vast majority of doctors would not be willing to actively participate were physician assisted suicide to be made legal. Finally the more a doctor specialises in caring for seriously-ill patients as their lives draw to an end, the more strongly he or she is likely to oppose a change in the law.

APM President Dr David Brooks, Macmillan consultant in palliative medicine at the Chesterfield Royal Hospital and Ashgate Hospice, welcomed the results.

"Palliative physicians dedicate their working lives to helping patients with incurable illness live as well as they can for as long as they can, and, where death is imminent, to live those dying days in as much comfort and dignity as possible," he said.

"These results give a clear message to legislators that those who care for terminally ill people believe society should be supporting people at this time in their lives and not putting them at risk. They also make clear that if society does want to legalise assistance in suicide, this should not be part of medical practice. People need to be confident that the doctor is there to care for them not to kill them."

"We need to ensure that all patients, whatever their care setting, have equitable access to the care and support they need at the time when they need it and end the postcode lottery in Palliative Care provision."

-Ends-

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For more information, please contact Becki Munro becki@compleat-online.co.uk on, 01489 565665 or 07789 935724

Notes to editors

1. Spokespeople from the APM are available on request
2. The RCP statement can be found at <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/press-releases/rcp-reaffirms-position-against-assisted-dying>
3. The RCGP survey can be found at <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/news/2014/february/rcgp-remains-opposed-to-any-change-in-the-law-on-assisted-dying.aspx>
4. A survey by Medix can be found at: <http://medixglobal.com/Medix-Case-Study-18-Euthanasia-and-Physician-assisted-Suicide.pdf>
5. The Association of British Neurologists statement can be found at:
http://www.theabn.org/media/docs/ABN%20publications/Assisted_Dying_April_2011.pdf

6. Definition of Palliative Care

Palliative care provides a rounded approach to improving the quality of life of patients and families affected by a life-threatening illness. Care includes the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. Palliative medicine is the specialty of doctors – otherwise known as palliative physicians – working within palliative care.

7. About the Association for Palliative Medicine

The Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland (APM) is an association for doctors who work in hospices and palliative care, specialist and generalist, in the community and hospitals. Formed in 1986, it has just over 1000 members from all over UK and Ireland, and a few doctors based overseas. The Association exists to promote the advancement and development of palliative medicine and is recognised as representing physicians at all grades who work in palliative medicine and those with an interest in the specialty.