

District of Columbia (2017-)

Assisted suicide became lawful in the District of Columbia effective from 6 June 2017.

The law is modelled on Oregon's including referral, at the discretion of the attending physician or consulting physician, to a psychiatrist or psychologist for assessment of whether or not the "the patient is suffering from a psychiatric or psychological disorder or depression causing impaired judgment".¹

DC Health has created online modules for patients and physicians which each of these participants must sign off as having been viewed. The modules are in power point format and basically set out the requirements of the Act.²

Minimal reporting

The annual report for 2018 records 4 people being issued with prescriptions for a lethal substance, two of whom took the lethal substance and died.³ The other two died from natural causes.

All four cases involved people with cancer. Surprisingly the annual report gives the age, race, educational status and medical condition for the two women who died.

None of the four reported cases of a lethal prescription being issued correspond with a case reported earlier in the media⁴ of a woman with ovarian cancer who ingested a lethal substance prescribed under the District of Columbia law. Her death at 4.41 am on Tuesday 7 August 2018 took place 2 hours and 26 minutes after ingesting the lethal substance.

Unless this media report was factually incorrect then the regime in the District of Columbia has failed to result in the complete documentation of one out of three deaths by a prescribed lethal substance.

Lethal prescriptions

The Pharmacist Education Module, which it is not mandatory for a pharmacist to view before dispensing the lethal substance, recommends that "Pharmacists should educate themselves to recognize prescriptions that apply to Death with Dignity and pre-medications. Medications should be taken on empty stomach to help with absorption. Medications must be ingested swiftly (i.e., less than ninety (90) seconds). Examples of possible medications include, but are not limited to, the following: – Secobarbital capsules with the contents removed and collected in a glass, then mixed with four (4) oz. of room temperature water or juice (note: do not use grapefruit juice); – Protocol of diazepam, digitalis, morphine sulfate and propranolol (aka DDMP)".

A pharmacist may dispense the lethal substance to any agent nominated either orally (presumably by phone) or in writing by the person who is intended to use it.⁵

¹ <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/titles/7/chapters/6B/>

² <https://dchealth.dc.gov/page/death-dignity-act-2016>

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https://dchealth.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doh/page_content/attachments/DWD%20Report%202018%20Final%20%20%208-2-2019.pdf

⁴ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/health/ct-washington-right-to-die-law-20181225-story.html>

⁵

https://dchealth.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doh/page_content/attachments/Death%20with%20Dignity%20-%20Education%20Modules.Pharmacist.DC%20HEALTH%20Version.06.18.18.pdf

The official form for patients allows for the optional appointment of a person to be responsible for discarding any unused lethal substance. The [DC Health website](#) suggests disposing of such substances mixed with coffee grounds or cat litter in, say, an empty margarine tub in the regular trash.⁶

Partnership with Compassion & Choices

A Death with Dignity and Best Practices for the Medical Community seminar jointly sponsored with Compassion and Choices and DC Health was held for health care professionals on August 10, 2018.⁷

Suicide promotion

In October 2018 –during Suicide Prevention Month!! – [a public service announcement](#) promoting assisted suicide was run in the District of Columbia by advocates concerned at the lack of residents using the deadly law.⁸

Conclusion

The promotion of assisted suicide during Suicide Prevention Month is a new low in the crassness of the assisted suicide experimenters desperate to find guinea pigs for their experiment in the American capital.

⁶ <https://dchealth.dc.gov/service/safe-disposal-medications>

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https://dchealth.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/doh/page_content/attachments/DWD%20Report%202018%20Final%20%20%208-2-2019.pdf

⁸ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/oct/10/the-deadly-advocacy-of-doctor-assisted-suicide/>