

FACTSHEET 03: Medical Opinion

The Australian Medical Association which represents approximately 30% of Australian doctors is opposed to legalising voluntary euthanasia. There are medical societies in other jurisdictions that are neutral on the issue and ample evidence of a diversity of opinion within the medical profession. Arguably there is a majority of doctors in favour of legislative change, as the following surveys reveal.

In 1987, Kuhse and Singer ⁽¹⁾ reported the results of a survey of 869 Victorian Doctors:

- 62% answered yes to the question "Do you think it is sometimes right for a doctor to take active steps to bring about the death of a patient who has requested the doctor to do this?" (64% of AMA members polled said yes)
- 93% thought such a request could be rational
- 59% thought that a practice similar to that in the Netherlands should be allowed
- 52% of AMA members thought that the AMA should change its stance on the issue.

In 1993, Baume and O'Malley⁽²⁾ surveyed 1268 NSW doctors:

- 59% thought actively hastening death on request was sometimes right
- 96% thought such a request could be rational
- 59% thought Netherlands practice should be allowed
- 52% thought their professional organization should approve medically assisted dying.

In 1994, Stevens and Hassan ⁽³⁾ surveyed 298 SA doctors:

- 89% thought a request to hasten death could be rational
- 47% were in favour of legalization of voluntary euthanasia.

In 1996, the RACGP ⁽⁴⁾ surveyed 886 members:

- 45% personally wished to have the option of voluntary euthanasia.
- 56% would not be distressed if it were available to others
- 68% believed that euthanasia can be an act of caring.
- 45% did not believe "present arrangements are adequate in delivering help to the dying."

- In 1997, Steinberg et al ⁽⁵⁾ surveyed 259 Queensland doctors: 36% thought a doctor should be allowed by law to assist a terminally ill person to die.

In 1997, Kuhse et al ⁽⁶⁾ published their survey of Australian end-of-life decisions (comparable to the Dutch Rummelink studies). From this survey of 1918 Australian doctors, they estimated that:

- 1.8% of deaths were by VE or physician assisted suicide

- 3.5% of deaths involved termination of the patient's life without explicit request
- in 24.7% treatment was withheld or withdrawn with the intention to hasten death
- in 6.5% of deaths opioids were administered with at least the partial intent to hasten death.

In 2001, Douglas et al ⁽⁷⁾ published their survey of 683 Australian general surgeons:

- 36.2% reported that they had given drugs in doses greater than was necessary to relieve symptoms with the intention of hastening death
- 20.4% reported that they had given drugs with the intention of hastening death, but without the explicit request of the patient
- 1.9% reported assisting with a suicide
- 4.2% reported having acceded to requests for voluntary euthanasia

In 2007, Neil et al ⁽⁸⁾ published their survey of 854 Victorian doctors:

- 53% of doctors in Victoria support the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia
- Of doctors who have experienced requests from patients to hasten death, 35% have administered drugs with the intention of hastening death.

In 2016, the AMA reviewed its policy ⁽⁹⁾ opposing voluntary euthanasia and doctor assisted dying. This included an online survey of more than 3,700 Australian doctors. Key findings were ⁽¹⁰⁾ :

- 68% said that even with optimal care, complete relief of suffering is not always possible.
- 60% said that, if lawful, voluntary euthanasia should be provided by doctors, and more than half (total 32%) said that they would practice it.
- 52% said that voluntary euthanasia can be a legitimate part of medical care.
- 50% expressly disagreed with the AMA's statement that "doctors should not provide euthanasia under any circumstances."
- 38% expressly disagreed with the AMA's policy opposed to assisted dying (only half expressly agreed)
- 35% claimed the practice should be lawful
- 60% said that if lawful, euthanasia should be provided by doctors, and more than half (total 32%) said that they would practice it.
- 52% claimed that euthanasia can form a legitimate part of medical care.
- 50% expressly disagreed with the AMA's statement that "doctors should not provide euthanasia under any circumstances."
- 38% expressly disagreed with the AMA's policy opposed to assisted dying (only half expressly agreed), and 35% said that euthanasia should be lawful.

In 2016, an *Australian Doctor* poll ⁽¹¹⁾ of about 370 NSW medical practitioners conducted by Ekas Marketing Research found approximately 60 per cent supported a change to the law if strict conditions, such as patients nearing the end of their lives and suffering "intolerable pain".

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