

Arizona Public Health Association (AZPHA) Resolution: End of Life Autonomy

Effective date: 2021

Approved by AZPHA Members: November 10, 2021

Background and Summary:

AZPHA stands in agreement with the American Public Health Association in recognizing the importance of advanced care planning, portable medical orders to make end of life requests clear, and enhanced palliative care options for persons seriously ill at the end of life.¹

In supporting end of life decision making, patients should be strongly supported in expressing their wishes through advanced directives and appointments of surrogates for care decisions when patients cannot speak for themselves; these discussions and preferences should be honored by healthcare providers.²

Recent advancements in technology, public health and epidemiology have illustrated the transition of death from an unexpected, often sudden event to an often anticipated ending to a protracted and incurable illness.³ Some persons consider that the prolongation of the dying process may come with unnecessary suffering and reflect this belief in their advanced care directives, directing enhanced palliative care as part of compassionate treatment in their planning documents even if that might hasten their impending death.⁴

We support the autonomy of patients and their loved ones to determine for themselves how their treatment or care can be provided. These decisions may include outcomes such as dying peacefully, without pain or distress or otherwise dying with dignity.

¹ American Public Health Association. APHA policy statement 81-23. *Death with dignity*. 1981; American Public Health Association. Patients' rights to self-determination at the end of life. 2008.

² *Id.*

³ Carr D, Luth E. Well-being at the end of life. *Annual review of sociology*. 2019;45. <https://pubmed-ncbi-nlm-nih-gov.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/33311838/>. Accessed Jun 14, 2021. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073018-022524.

⁴ Trankle SA. Decisions that hasten death: Double effect and the experiences of physicians in australia. *BMC Med Ethics*. 2014;15:26. Accessed Jun 14, 2021. doi: 10.1186/1472-6939-15-26.

Whereas AzPHA recognizes the importance of advanced care planning and portable medical orders to make end of life wishes clear; and

Whereas many people include in their advanced care directives the desire for compassionate treatment and enhanced palliative care even if it hastens their impending death; and

Whereas patients who have those wishes reflected in their advanced care directives sometimes are unable to receive care consistent with their wishes because of limitations in services that are available.

Be it resolved by AZPHA that we support the right for persons to choose enhanced palliative care options even if that care might hasten their impending death. These preferences should be honored by healthcare providers. Further, we support public policy and resource allocation such that all persons in Arizona have access to the end-of-life care decisions of their choice.