



## **Palliative Care Nurses New Zealand (PCNNZ)**

### **Position statement on Assisted Dying (2021)**

#### **Palliative Care**

The World Health Organization (WHO) define palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and whānau facing a life limiting illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, be they physical, psychosocial or spiritual.

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) recognize that nurses are uniquely placed to provide compassionate, skilled care to patients and their whanau at end of life. ICN view the role of the nurse as fundamental to a palliative care approach which aims to improve quality of life through reducing suffering through holistic assessment and provision of care.

A fundamental principle of palliative care is to neither hasten nor to postpone death.

#### **Background of Assisted Dying in New Zealand**

In a binding referendum in October 2020, New Zealanders voted in favor of The End of Life Choice Act 2019, this was subsequently passed in parliament in November 2020 and came into effect on the 7th of November 2021.

In June 2020, Hospice New Zealand with support ANZSPM and PCNNZ sought a declaratory judgement from the High Court on certain aspects of the End of Life Choice Act. As a result of this the High Court found that organizations such as hospices have a right to hold conscientious objection.

#### **Position Statement**

As the professional association for palliative care nursing in New Zealand, PCNNZ do not support the practice of assisted dying. PCNNZ recognize that assisted dying is separate to the practice of palliative care. As such, PCNNZ will continue to advocate for equitable access and delivery of palliative care for all New Zealanders.

PCNNZ recognize and acknowledge that membership may, individually, hold a diversity of views on assisted dying.

PCNNZ recognize and acknowledge that members may work for organizations with differing stances on provision of assisted dying services.

PCNNZ recognize the right of the nurse, as both an individual and within an organizational collective, to consciously object, including on moral, ethical, or religious grounds to participation of involvement in provision of assisted dying.

PCNNZ supports ongoing provision of palliative care for patients also pursuing, or interested in pursuing, assisted dying. This provision includes the recognition of symptoms or issues causing distress, and where possible, provision of relief from these.

PCNNZ believes the New Zealand government needs to develop policies to fully support integration of palliative care into all levels of the health system.

PCNNZ advocates for the New Zealand government to prioritize and fund palliative care nursing provision, ensure equitable and timely access to palliative care for all New Zealanders, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or location.

PCNNZ advocates for education, training, and support for all nurses and health professionals to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in the principles and practice of palliative care to enable them to provide palliative care, to a high standard across all health care settings.

### **About PCNNZ**

PCNNZ is a nursing society set up to represent professional interests of nurses providing palliative care across all clinical settings. Our key objectives are:

- Recognition and support of specialist palliative care nursing across New Zealand.
- Acknowledgment of, and support for, the provision of generalist palliative care as an integral part of all nursing practice.
- Promotion of collaboration between nurses working in specialist palliative care, and those working in other settings, to achieve an integrated palliative care model.
- Promotion and contribution to the recognition of the professional status of palliative nursing locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Support for the advancement of palliative nursing knowledge, through the promotion of education, research, and the continual development of clinical practice.
- Driving of interdisciplinary collaboration with partner organizations engaged in palliative care provision.

PCNNZ upholds and supports professional nursing practice, as outlined in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 and the Nursing Council of New Zealand. PCNNZ is committed as an organization to upholding and supporting Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## **Definition of Terms Used**

### ***Palliative Care:***

The WHO define palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients, and their families, facing the problems associated with life-threatening illnesses, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment, treatment of pain and other problems (be they physical, psychosocial, or spiritual).

Palliative care:

- Provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms.
- Affirms life and regards dying as a normal process.
- Intends neither to hasten nor postpone death.
- Integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care.
- Offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death.
- Offers a support system to help the family cope during the patients' illness and in their own bereavement.
- Uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counseling, if indicated.
- Will enhance quality of life and may also positively influence the course of illness.
- Is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.

### ***Assisted Dying:***

Assisted dying means that a person with a terminal illness, who meets the eligibility criteria, can request medication to end their life. In New Zealand, assisted dying involves:

- A person's medical practitioner (doctor) or nurse practitioner administering them medication to relieve their suffering by bringing on death; or
- The self-administration of medication by the person to bringing on death.