



# Ethics

## Forgoing Medical Therapy

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### Learning Activities

#### Activity 1: Short Paper

Ask students take a scenario of a dying patient (either from their own practice or one that you provide to all) and briefly describe in a paper what the dying process would involve for each of the following options:

- adequate pain management;
- terminal sedation;
- voluntary stopping of eating and drinking;
- assisted suicide;
- voluntary, active euthanasia.

Students should discuss the players likely to be involved, legal issues, and probable clinical course of dying for each option.

The purpose of this exercise is to help them objectively consider how each option would affect the patient's probable length of life, quality of life, pain control, social isolation, impact on family, insurance reimbursement, etc.

#### Activity 2: In-Class Debate or Panel

1. Assign students to read a good general reference on this topic. (For example Quill T. E., Lo, B., & Brock, D. W. (1997). Palliative options of last resort: a comparison of voluntarily stopping eating and drinking, terminal sedation, physician-assisted suicide, and voluntary euthanasia. *JAMA Dec;278(23):2099-2104.*)
2. Assign the pro and con position for each topic to one or more students.
3. Ask each pair or group to debate the issue in class for a short period (perhaps five minutes) followed by comments from the rest of the students on issues that were not raised, compelling arguments, etc.
4. Alternatively, assign a professional role to a group of students (e.g., physician, family member, chaplain, nurse, hospital risk manager/lawyer, ethicist). Present them with a case to discuss as a panel.
5. Ask the class again to critique the panel and add comments on the issues.

#### Activity 3: Panel of Experts

1. Arrange to have a panel of stakeholders discuss these issues for the class. The invited participants might include a hospice nurse, physician, representative of an advocacy group for physician assisted suicide, family member, person with terminal illness, etc.
2. Ask each panelist to make a short statement of their position and then have the class pose questions or cases to the panel.