

PRESS RELEASE - March 6, 2003

INCREASED PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE DEATHS IN 2002

While the state of Oregon is in a desperate financial crisis, it is very troubling to learn that there was an increase in the number of prescriptions written for lethal drugs, and an increase in the number of people dying from physician-assisted suicide in Oregon in 2002.

The state of Oregon is in a financial depression, with a significant decrease in financial support of vulnerable ill Oregonians. The Oregon Department of Human Services has informed thousands of disabled citizens that they will no longer financially support life-sustaining medications, such as anti-rejection medications for organ transplant patients. We have tens of thousands of medically need and mentally ill who have been informed that as of March 1st, their medications will no longer be paid for from the Oregon Health Plan. It is sad and dangerous that in today's medical environment we are promoting physician-assisted suicide instead of supporting life-sustaining care for those who need it. While physician-assisted suicide is supported by Oregon Medicaid tax dollars, financial support for life-sustaining care for Oregon's medically needy is being significantly reduced.

I am disappointed that so many vulnerable seriously ill Oregonians died from physician prescribed lethal drugs in 2002," said Dr. Kenneth Stevens, President of Physicians for Compassionate Care, "I am concerned that some doctors in Oregon are depending on these drugs to end the life of patients, rather than providing proper end-of-life care."

Dr. Stevens says, "Physician-assisted suicide is really doctor-directed suicide, because it requires a doctor to prescribe a lethal amount of drug. A physician's prescription is considered a written order or directive for the patient receiving the prescription. Physician-assisted suicide empowers doctors, not patients. Unfortunately, in Oregon, some physicians are using their medical license as a lethal license."