

PRESS RELEASE - February 21, 2005

PCC ANTICIPATES SUPREME COURT ACTION ON ASSISTED-SUICIDE CASE

Physicians for Compassionate Care (PCC) doctors remain hopeful that the U.S. Supreme Court will take the appeal of the Oregon assisted-suicide case as early as Tuesday, February 22, 2005. Officers from the physicians' group have stated, "**No state should be permitted unilaterally to exempt itself from federal law forbidding the misuse of federally controlled substances to overdose vulnerable patients.**" For decades, the Controlled Substances Act has forbidden the use of certain addictive and dangerous drugs for any non-medical purpose-including overdosing patients, not just abusing drugs for recreational purposes. Oregon should not be allowed to remove the protections afforded by the Controlled Substances Act. Doctors in the other 49 states can provide superlative care of the seriously ill without resorting to assisted suicide. And so can Oregon doctors.

In over ten years since the assisted-suicide law was passed, not one state has followed Oregon in legalizing this dangerous practice. That is because assisted suicide is not needed at any rate. To date, there has not been one documented case of a lethal overdose being prescribed under this law because of actual untreatable pain. It is always for psychological and social reasons, primarily fear and depression. In the case of Michael Freeland, not only was this unfortunate man depressed, at one point, he was even determined by Multnomah County Judge Elizabeth Welch to lack competence to make his own medical decisions. Yet, assisted suicide doctors did nothing to protect him from the lethal overdose they had given to this depressed and desperate man. They just left him: confused; depressed; and despairing with the assisted-suicide drugs to take or not.

PCC is hopeful the U.S. Supreme Court will take up the assisted-suicide appeal and determine that the Department of Justice does have the right to enforce the Controlled Substances Act in Oregon just as it does in the other 49 states. Patients like Michael Freeland deserve the same protection in Oregon that is provided in the other states. The Controlled Substances Act is already clear. Should the Supreme Court fail to take this case on appeal, more depressed, frightened and confused patients will be given overdoses by a few misguided doctors while Congress attempts to pass another clarification of the already existing law. PCC would work with Congress to pass such a law but would lament the delay and the further unnecessary loss of life.