

Introduction

Heartlinks is committed to upholding the principles of compassion, autonomy, and respect for individuals facing end-of-life decisions. In alignment with the Washington State Death with Dignity Act, Heartlinks has developed this policy to guide our approach to Death with Dignity within the organization. This policy outlines the procedures, requirements, and ethical considerations that will govern our involvement in the Death with Dignity process.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Heartlinks provides comprehensive support to individuals who choose to exercise their rights under the Washington State Death with Dignity Act, while upholding the highest standards of patient care, confidentiality, and ethical conduct. All end-of-life services, as defined in the Medicare Hospice Conditions of Participation 42 CFR Part 418 and in RCW 70.127.010 will be provided.

Definitions

- Death with Dignity: Refers to the process by which an eligible, mentally capable adult may request and self-administer medication prescribed by a qualified medical provider for the purpose of hastening their death, in accordance with the Washington State Death with Dignity Act.
- Eligible Patient: An individual who meets the eligibility criteria as defined by the Washington State Death with Dignity Act.
- Qualified medical provider" means a physician licensed under chapter 18.57 or 18.71 RCW, a physician assistant licensed under chapter 18.71A RCW, or an advanced registered nurse practitioner licensed under chapter 18.79 RCW.

Procedure

1. Providing Information

Heartlinks will ensure that any individual expressing a desire for Death with Dignity will be provided with information about their rights under the Washington State Death with Dignity Act and House Bill 1608. House Bill 1608 "prohibits health care entities from limiting health care providers' ability to give medically accurate information to their patients if a provider is acting in good faith, within the provider's scope of practice, education, training, and experience, including specialty areas of practice and board certification, and within the accepted standard of care. This includes information related to the Death with Dignity Act (RCW 70.245)."

2. Qualified Medical Provider Consultation

- a. Heartlinks will maintain a list of qualified medical providers who are willing to participate in the Death with Dignity process.
- b. Upon request, Heartlinks will facilitate a consultation between the eligible patient and a participating qualified medical provider.

3. Documentation and Reporting

- a. Heartlinks will maintain records of interactions related to Death with Dignity, in accordance with legal requirements and patient confidentiality standards.
- b. Heartlinks will report any cases of Death with Dignity to the Washington State Department of Health as required by law.

4. Supportive Care

Throughout the process, Heartlinks will provide physician support, nursing support, emotional support, spiritual support, personal care, grief support, and other relevant resources to patients and their families, including making referrals or coordinating other services.

Death Certificate Compliance with the Death with Dignity Act

Washington State's Death with Dignity Act (RCW 70.245) states that "...the patient's death certificate...shall list the underlying terminal disease as the cause of death." The Act also states that, "Actions taken in accordance with this chapter do not, for any purpose, constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing, or homicide, under the law."

If you know the decedent used the Death with Dignity Act, Heartlinks will act in good faith compliance with the law when completing the death report. Which includes:

1. List the underlying terminal disease as the cause of death.
2. Mark the manner of death as "Natural."
3. Avoid using language in the cause of death section that might indicate the decedent used the Death with Dignity Act, such as: Suicide, Assisted suicide, Physician-assisted suicide, Death with Dignity, I-1000, Mercy killing, Euthanasia, Secobarbital or Seconal, and/or Pentobarbital or Nembutal.

Confidentiality

Heartlinks will strictly adhere to all state and federal laws regarding patient confidentiality. All records and information related to Death with Dignity will be treated with the utmost respect for privacy.

Compliance and Ethics

Heartlinks is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards and complying with all applicable laws, including the Washington State Death with Dignity Act. Any staff member found to be in violation of this policy, or any legal requirements will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

Heartlinks will not discharge, demote, suspend, discipline, or otherwise discriminate against health care providers for providing to their patients medically accurate information within scope as described, or information relating to the Death with Dignity Act.

This policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary to remain in alignment with the evolving legal and ethical landscape regarding Death with Dignity in Washington State. If changes were to be approved, all changes will be submitted to the Washington Department of Health within 30 days.

Contact information for specific questions about services available at Heartlinks:

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