

PURPOSE

To provide guidance to Alpha Home Health and Hospice (Agency) employees, agents, independent contractors, patients, families, and the community it serves regarding Agency’s participation in Washington State’s Death with Dignity Act program (“DWD”).

POLICY

Staff acting in the course and scope of their employment or otherwise on behalf of the Agency shall be allowed to participate in the DWD only to the extent described in this Policy. The Agency may also provide requisite information to patients or their representative about the DWD end-of-life option.

SCOPE

Applies to all employees, independent contractors, and other persons or entities (“Staff”), including other health care providers while such individuals or entities are under the management or direct control of the Agency or while acting within the course and scope of any employment by, or contract with, the Agency.

PROVISIONS OF DWD

The Washington Death with Dignity Act allows terminally ill adults seeking to end their life to request lethal doses of medication from medical and osteopathic physicians. These terminally ill patients must be Washington residents who have less than six months to live. Participation in the act is entirely voluntary. The Act does not require health care providers to provide prescriptions to qualified patients. Individual providers, staff, and health care agencies may choose whether or not to participate in the DWD.

Hospice providers and agencies provide symptom management and after-death support to terminally ill patients. Some hospice patients may choose to participate in the DWD. The Act requires that hospice agencies provide information about which DWD services are and are not generally available to patients at their agency.

AGENCY PARTICIPATION IN THE DWD

1. All Staff are expected to respond to any patient’s query about life-ending medication with openness and compassion. The Agency believes its Staff have an obligation to openly discuss the patient’s concerns, unmet needs, feelings, and desires about the dying process. Staff should seek to learn the meaning behind the patient’s questions and help the patient understand the range of available options. Ultimately, the Agency’s goal is to help patients make informed decisions about end-of-life care.

2. With the following limitations, the Agency allows its employees, agents, and contractors to participate in the DWD if they so choose. This means those individuals may, consistent with his or her training, licensure, and scope of duties with the Agency:
 - Provide resources to a patient or family who requests more information about participating in DWD, including the names of DWD participating providers;
 - Provide counseling, psychosocial, and spiritual support to the patient and family, along with education about the Agency's DWD policy; and/or
 - Be present only after the patient self-administers the life-ending medication.
3. Agency Staff may not:
 - Perform the duties of an attending physician;
 - Perform the duties of a consulting physician;
 - Prescribe life-ending medication;
 - Place a rectal catheter for the purpose of self-administration of DWD medications;
 - Transport DWD medications from the pharmacy to the patient's residence;
 - Act as a witness for the patient's request to receive a prescription for the life-ending medication.
4. While participating in the DWD, all Staff must ensure the appropriate standard of care is followed.
5. Agency Staff who violate this Policy shall be subject to disciplinary action or termination of contract.
6. Agency will not prohibit any employee, independent contractor (including physicians), or other affiliated entity from participating in the DWD while such individuals or entities are acting outside the management or control of or the course and scope of any employment duties by, or contract with, the Agency. Should an employee, contractor, agent or other affiliated entity participate in DWD-related activities outside of their employment/affiliation with the Agency, such individuals or entities shall clearly identify themselves to the patient, patient's family, and/or patient's agent and make clear that they are acting in a capacity that is not affiliated with the Agency.

PROCEDURE

1. Agency Staff will (1) openly discuss the patient's concerns, unmet needs, feelings, and desires about the dying process; (2) seek to learn meaning behind the patient's concerns and feelings; (3) help the patient understand the range of available options for addressing those concerns, unmet needs, feelings, and desires, including the DWD.

2. Agency community liaisons will provide education materials about end-of-life options upon request.
3. Agency Staff will be educated on the Agency's DWD policy and participation.
4. Patients will be provided with education materials about end-of-life options at the time of admission. These materials will include a statement about the Agency's position with regard to participation in the DWD and this Policy.
5. Any patient wishing to receive life-ending medication will be provided the contact information of providers that participate in the DWD.
6. If a patient has requested information regarding the DWD or is engaged in the process of exercising his or her rights under the DWD, the Agency will update its interdisciplinary team regarding such request or participation. The interdisciplinary team will oversee the Agency's involvement in the patient's DWD process.
7. Agency Staff will ensure the correct procedures are followed and the correct documentation is completed in accordance with its role in the DWD.

Laws/Regulations:

2023 c 38 § 4, eff. July 23, 2023;

2009 c 1 § 3 (Initiative Measure No. 1000, approved November 4, 2008), eff. March 5, 2009.

Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 70.245 et seq.

Washington State Department of Health Regulations Chapter 246-978 WAC