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ASSISTED SUICIDE, INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND PALLIATIVE CARE: THE IMPLICATIONS ON SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT AT END OF LIFE

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Aim: This presentation explores the premise of assisted suicide and the impacts on symptom management with a consumer directed palliative approach. There is significant debate around assisted suicide and the premise of good palliative care. Legislation in many countries indicates assisted suicide is only available for 'insufferable pain', when this is considered from a symptom management perspective; no one should experience insufferable pain through the implementation of appropriate interventions to meet a person's pain experience. The debate from a social, spiritual and ethical position is diverse and complex, however, regardless of one's position in the debate, there is no substitute for best practice palliative care. Clinicians need to have an awareness and understanding of the issues, as well as keys to manage personal bias on this matter in order to ensure effective symptom management is achieved for the consumer.

Evaluation: As a not for profit Christian organisation, there are significant moral and ethical considerations associated with Assisted Suicide, however from a consumer directed focus, there is a requirement to ensure that individual needs are met and this means viewpoints which are plastic. The Salvation Army Aged Care Plus operates in an environment of dichotomies and to meet individual needs, there first needs to be an understanding of the issues; we have achieved this through education. Our education resources include –

- Assisted Suicide
- The Sanctity of Life
- Spirituality
- Palliative Care Interventions to ensure appropriate Symptom Management

Implications for practice: The resource was prompted by a realisation that all people experience the end of life differently and have specific views on euthanasia and assisted suicide. It is imperative our staff have a good understanding of the issues and ensure that best practice palliative care is not taken into consideration as a sil approach. There is always a need for appropriate symptom management regardless of the circumstance. Our aim is to ensure symptom management is not confused as something it is not by either clouding this by religious ideals or social ideations based on decisions which are made in regards to one's own life choices.

Biography

Heidi Dowse is currently employed by The Salvation Army Aged Care Plus, Australia, as the Clinic, Quality and Compliance Manager. Heidi has worked in Aged Care for almost 30 years, holding a variety of positions, including Dementia Specialist and Learning and Development Manager. She currently has a Master's Degree in Nursing where she has researched culture change in aged care. Heidi is passionate about education and believes the key to change lies in moving the heart of staff before being able to move their thoughts to change. She is able to do this by sharing the stories of the people she has had the honour to care for, in particular at the end of their life. Heidi believes in always looking for the shiny in life. So often we spend our lives looking for mud. If that is all you look for, you will miss the shining moments in life.

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