

Briefing note

Assisted dying

Context

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) has prepared this briefing ahead of the 2nd reading of Rob Marris' Private Members Bill Assisted Dying (No.2). The RCP's position is based on the findings of the survey conducted with members and fellows in autumn 2014.

RCP position

The RCP is opposed to a change in the law on assisted dying. In response to the question 'Do you support a change in the law to permit assisted suicide by the terminally ill with the assistance of doctors?' The majority of respondents outlined that they did not support a change to the law on assisted dying. Although there is still a majority opposing a change in the law on assisted dying. There has been a 10.7% decrease in the percentage of members and fellows holding this view since the survey was last conducted in 2006.

In order to ensure that the RCP's position is reflective of its members and fellows we have committed to ensuring that we regularly engage with our members and fellows on this important issue.

Results of survey

All of the RCP's members and fellows based in the UK were given the opportunity to respond to the survey on assisted dying. The survey was accompanied by a short consultation document which outlined the current legal framework regarding assisted dying. The survey received approximately 6,700 responses from physicians from across the UK. The results of the survey questions are included below.

1. Do you support a change in the law to permit assisted suicide by the terminally ill with the assistance of doctors?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	2168	32.3%
Yes, but not by doctors	684	10.2%
No	3858	57.5%

2. We ask you to consider the following statement: '(We) believe that with improvements in palliative care, good clinical care can be provided within existing legislation, and that patients can die with dignity. A change in legislation is not needed.' Do you agree? (The question asked in 2006)

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	4179	62.5%
No	2507	37.5%

Answers from 2006 survey for comparison:

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	3741	73.2%
No	1327	26.0%

3. What should the College's position be on 'assisted dying' as defined in the RCP's consultation document?

Response	Number	Percentage
In favour	1649	24.6%
Opposed	2972	44.4%
Neutral/no stance	2076	31.0%

4. Regardless of your support or opposition to change, in the event of legislation receiving royal assent, would you personally be prepared to participate actively in 'assisted dying' as defined in the RCP's consultation document.

Response	Number	Percentage
In favour	1432	21.4%
Opposed	3904	58.4%
Neutral	1345	20.1%

A similar question was asked in 2006, and regardless of support for change, the percentages of those prepared to personally participate actively in a process to enable a patient to terminate their own life were very similar to the above results and were as follows:

Response	Percentage
In favour	18.9%
Opposed	59.4%
Uncertain	19.4%

Contact

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