

Position statement on assisted suicide



St John of God Health Care does not support assisted suicide or euthanasia.

St John of God Health Care models its care on the healing mission of Jesus Christ. This means extending hospitality, hope and healing to all of those we serve. Our values of Hospitality, Compassion, Respect, Justice and Excellence inform all that we do in caring for patients and their families at times of vulnerability in life. We walk with our patients and their families at the end of life, providing palliative care, pastoral and chaplaincy services that are attuned to the needs of each person.

At St John of God Health Care we respect and honour the dignity of each person we serve, recognising that life is sacred from conception until natural death. While responding in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner to the needs and requests of patients, St John of God Health Care does not support assisted suicide or euthanasia.

We believe that comprehensive, excellent and compassionate end of life care that alleviates pain and other symptoms should be provided to all in need, so that no person need resort to contemplating assisted suicide. Our experience

demonstrates that with the provision of high quality pain management, it is exceptionally rare for a patient to have significant discomfort at the time of death.

Sometimes, when diagnosed with an illness, or during treatment, patients will want to talk to their clinicians and family about a desire for a hastened end to life. Most often these requests are driven by a person's fear of being a burden to their family and loved ones, or feelings of depression, hopelessness, and fear, or a sense of loss of control. Our years of experience in working with patients and their families at the end of life demonstrate that through the provision of appropriate care, these concerns can be addressed.

Australians remain strong supporters of universal health care and expect that their care needs will be met at each stage of life. The Grattan Institute report identified that when it comes to end of life care Australians know what they want: to die comfortably at home, supported by family and friends and effective services. Yet, due to inadequate funding and coordination of services, only 14% of Australians are currently able to access the care and support needed to die as they wish.¹

About St John of God Health Care

St John of God Health Care is a leading provider of high quality health care services in Australia, and has been delivering care to the people of Western Australia for 120 years. St John of God Health Care is a Catholic not-for-profit organisation operating 23 facilities across Australia and New Zealand. We employ more than 13,000 people in the provision of hospital care, home nursing, disability services, and social outreach programs. We are committed to providing outstanding care for those we serve.

At St John of God Health Care we recognise that people expect to be able to access high quality care when and where they need it, to be cared for with respect and dignity, and that these rights will be protected as they approach the end of their life. To achieve this requires a commitment to give people the care they expect and deserve at end of life, and this requires all involved to increase resources for end of life and palliative care services.

St John of God Health Care supports palliative care research, and we strive to deliver evidence-based high quality palliative care and pain management to those patients who are referred to our palliative care services. Specialist palliative care services are available in our public and private hospitals in Western Australia. Our palliative care services utilise the skills of multidisciplinary teams to help prevent and relieve suffering, and optimise quality of life for our patients – physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

We assist those in our care to maintain independence where this is possible; to enable people to live life as comfortably as possible. Our palliative care clinicians work with patients and their families to keep them fully informed about treatment options, participating in all decisions about their care, and helping them to feel more in control of their situation. Several St John of God Health Care hospitals participate in the Palliative Care Outcomes Collaborative (PCOC), which is a national program working to support improved outcomes for people accessing palliative care services.

We believe that it is essential that every person in Western Australia has access to the care they need at the end of life, and we intend to continue to work, hopefully in collaboration with others, to ensure that services are extended to all in need of care. We are committed to increasing the palliative and end of life care we provide and welcome further initiatives to extend the services we can offer in Western Australia.

St John of God Health Care is one of Western Australia's principal providers of end of life care. St John of God Health Care hospitals delivered 31% of all inpatient palliative care in Western Australia in 2015-16.

St John of God Health Care provides palliative care services through its hospitals at:

- St John of God Murdoch Hospital and St John of God Murdoch Community Hospice: Specialist palliative care service with 20 beds (private and public), hospital wide consultancy service, clinical nurse specialist, palliative medical specialists, allied health services, day support service, outpatients clinic;
- St John of God Subiaco Hospital: Specialist palliative care service with five beds, hospital wide consultancy service, nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, palliative medical specialists, allied health services, outpatients clinic;
- St John of God Bunbury Hospital: Specialist palliative care service with ten inpatient beds (private and public), clinical nurse specialist, palliative medical specialist, advanced training palliative care registrar, allied health services, palliative medical consultant led outpatients rooms;
- St John of God Geraldton Hospital: Specialist palliative care service with five beds (private and public); and,
- St John of God Midland Public and Private Hospitals: Currently recruiting a palliative care nurse and a palliative care physician to provide specialised care for patients and further develop the hospitals' ability to provide the best possible end of life care.

References

1. Swerissen, H. and Duckett, S., (2014) Dying Well, Grattan Institute, see www.grattan.edu.au



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