**International Children’s Palliative Care Network (ICPCN) Position Statement on the practice of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide**

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<th>Purpose</th>
<th>To state the position of ICPCN on euthanasia and assisted dying to support members engaged in discussions in their countries.</th>
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<td>Summary</td>
<td>This statement clarifies the position of ICPCN on euthanasia and assisted suicide.</td>
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**Introduction**

The International Children’s Palliative Care Network (ICPCN) is a network of all individuals and organisation working in children’s palliative care worldwide. The vision of ICPCN is to live in a world where every child and young person with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition and their families can receive the best quality of life and care regardless of which country they live in. We believe that the total needs of life limited and life threatened children should be met to encompass physical, emotional, spiritual and developmental aspects of care. To achieve this, children’s palliative care must be acknowledged as a unique and specialist service.

**ICPCN aims to:**

- Assist services across the world to develop and meet the total care and support needs of life-limited children and their families.
- Advocate for and raise awareness of children’s palliative care and the specific needs of life-limited or life-threatened children and their families.
- Campaign for the global development of children’s palliative care services.
- Increase the international evidence base for children’s palliative care.
Summary of recommendations
The ICPCN recommends that all governments:

- integrate children’s palliative care into their country’s health care system
- ensure training for health care workers in communication skills, bioethics and children’s palliative care
- encourage Advance Care Planning and discussion of preferences for end-of-life care.

Position statement
The aim of children’s palliative care is to enable the child to live a life of maximum quality by preventing and relieving suffering. Enabling good quality of life cannot include hastening death, and we do not believe that euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide is part of children’s palliative care.

- The ICPCN acknowledges that even with the best support palliative care can offer the suffering of children and their families may not be relieved at all times.

- The ICPCN acknowledges the significant deficits in providing palliative care for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions around the world.

- The ICPCN advocates for healthcare reform programs around the world to strengthen end of life care by remedying shortages in the palliative care workforce, ensuring access to appropriate medications and resources.

- Good practice requires that the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence should be followed at all times. Medical interventions are only permissible when their benefit to the patient outweighs their harm. Withholding or withdrawing interventions causing more harm than benefit does not constitute euthanasia.

- The unintended death of a child as a consequence of an appropriately prescribed intervention to provide comfort for a distressing symptom, even when death is a possible outcome from that intervention, is not euthanasia.

- Sedation that becomes necessary for management of distress caused by refractory symptoms (‘palliative sedation’) is not euthanasia.

- Many requests for euthanasia or assisted suicide are made in order to draw attention to specific causes of emotional distress and despair. Those can often be reversed with appropriate support. Such requests should be acknowledged with respect and be extensively explored in order to understand, appropriately address and, if possible, remedy the underlying difficulties that gave rise to the request.

- In the face of a request for euthanasia or assisted suicide, provision of effective symptom control becomes particularly important, especially with respect to symptoms associated with a serious and sustained “desire for death” such as depressive disorders and poorly controlled pain. In such situations, early referral to an appropriate specialist should be considered.
Definitions

Palliative Care is defined by the World Health Organization as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spirit; it
- Regards dying as a normal process;
- Focuses on the quality of living as death approaches;
- Intends neither to hasten nor postpone death;
- Integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;
- Offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death;
- Offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient’s illness and in their own bereavement;
- Uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling, if indicated;
- Enhances the quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness; and
- Is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.

Euthanasia is the act of intentionally, knowingly and directly causing the death of a person, at the request of the person, with the intention of relieving intractable suffering. If someone other than the person who dies performs the last act, euthanasia has occurred.

Euthanasia can be:
- a) Voluntary – where a competent person requests it.
- b) Involuntary – where a competent person is not consulted
- c) Non-voluntary – where the person is not competent to make the request

The term ‘voluntary’ alone does not imply the decision is an autonomous one, since competent people may be subject to various forms of coercion (deliberate or otherwise).

Assisted suicide is the act of intentionally, knowingly and directly providing the means of death to another person, at the request of that person, with the intention of relieving intractable suffering, in order for that person to use that means to commit suicide. If the person who dies performs the last act, assisted suicide has occurred.

None of the following should be seen as euthanasia
- Withholding treatment that will do more harm than good.
- Withdrawing treatment that will do more harm than good.
- Sedation that is necessary for relief of distress caused by refractory symptoms.

No medical intervention should be considered permissible unless its benefits outweigh its harms. When cure is no longer possible, those benefits and harms must be considered broadly to include emotional, psychological and spiritual interests as well as physical. Consideration should rely on discussions between the family and health care team (and where possible the child) as they know the child best and, in so doing, establish whether interventions are in the child’s best interest. Interventions considered not to be in the child’s best interest – those where harm outweighs benefit – should be withdrawn or withheld. This represents an ethically sound clinical decision making process and does not constitute any form of euthanasia.