



Patient with terminal cancer. (Source: Marie Curie: Great Daffodil Appeal (organization).)

Opinion: Physician-Assisted Suicide is a Patient's Right

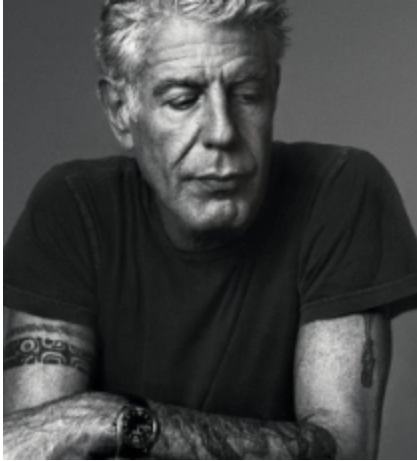
By: Justin Hartsell

Every human being deserves to be able to make his or her own choices in life. Some of the most challenging topics in our society have included wrongfully inhibiting one's choice, such as rights concerning gay marriage or abortion. Similarly, [physician-assisted suicide](#) is a controversial topic that allows a person to deservedly have the right to choose to end his or her life.

According to the [American Medical Association \(AMA\)](#), physician-assisted suicide is “when a physician facilitates a patient’s death by providing the necessary means and/or information to enable the patient to perform the life-ending act.”

Physician-assisted suicide, or sometimes called “[right to die](#),” can be misunderstood as someone simply looking for “a way out.” However, it is much more than that. It can be a means of finding relief from a hard-fought battle for a patient experiencing a chronic, serious illness.

It is important to address the negative connotations around the word “[suicide](#).” There is not one of us who has not been troubled by a story of suicide. Personal examples would be when learning of [Anthony Bourdain’s](#) and [Kate Spade’s](#) back-to-back suicides, or when one of my friends told of a fellow college student who committed suicide after making a D in a class and being disowned by her family who expected academic perfection.

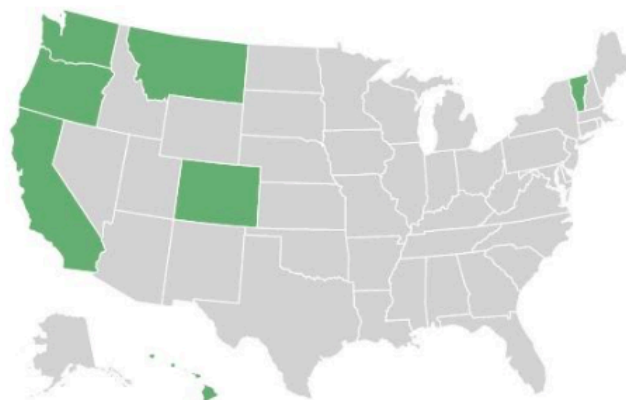


[Left] Anthony Bourdain (Source: Twitter.); [Right] Kate Spade (Source: The Daily Republic.)

With such connotations surrounding the word “suicide,” a preferable term is “[assisted dying](#).”

The [AMA highlights](#) that assisted dying is offered to a patient when he or she is “suffering from a terminal, painful, [and] debilitating disease.” States like Vermont and Washington stress that the patient must also be of “[sound mind](#).”

It would be inhumane to deny a suffering patient an option of relief. If a patient has [terminal cancer](#) spreading aggressively, advanced stages of [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome \(AIDS\)](#), is diagnosed with [Lou Gehrig’s disease](#), is living with [muscular dystrophy](#) or has some other debilitating disease, assisted dying can serve as some form of final comfort and bringing peace to that individual.



Assisted dying, or "Right to Die," only legal in eight U.S. states, including Oregon, Washington, California, Montana, Colorado and Maine. (Source: World Population Review.)

According to the Associated Press (AP), [Maine became the eighth state to legalize assisted dying in July](#) of this year. The AP reported that Maine's Democratic [Governor Janet Mills](#) signed the bill into office and said, "It is my hope that this law, while respecting the right to personal liberty, will be used sparingly."

Reflecting on Mills' statement, it is important to note that the argument for legalizing assisted dying is not about approving of rampant clinical deaths. Rather, it is about giving human beings their right to decide what happens to their lives during critical illnesses.



Maine Governor Janet Mills (D) signing July 2019 bill. (Source: Associated Press.)

The laws regarding assisted dying do need to become more defined, though. An example of this is a [USA Today story](#) telling of a Netherlands woman asking to be "euthanized" if her [Alzheimer's](#) worsened. Once it did, she repeatedly cried out "No!"—not comprehending what was happening—while the family held her down and the doctor facilitated the procedure. This resulted in a legal discussion regarding ethics.

Though assisted dying needs to be better defined legally, patients deserve this choice when facing critical illnesses.

If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts, call the [National Suicide Prevention Hotline](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) at 1-800-273-8255.