

Glossary of Healthcare Terms

Euthanasia - Two Greek words meaning “good death”; a euphemism for Mercy killing; a confused term today since it can mean dying in peace (passive) or dying because of suicide or homicide (active).

Assisted suicide - Assistance from a second party, usually a physician to end one’s life. Physician assisted suicide is now legal in five states: Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado and Vermont. It is legal in Montana by court order.

Palliative care - Relief of pain through analgesic medicine; often neglected because of the desire to cure and the fear of addiction; only recently accepted by Medicare payment. Palliative care is provided by a team of doctors, nurses and other specialists who work together with a patient’s other doctors to provide an extra layer of support. It is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness and can be provided along with curative treatment. Palliative care treats people suffering from serious and chronic illnesses such as cancer, cardiac disease such as congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), kidney failure, Parkinson’s, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Alzheimer’s and other health issues.

Coma-a state of prolonged unconsciousness; nonresponse to stimuli; one can recover from, and often does; is not “brain-dead.”

Medically induced coma - is when a patient receives a controlled dose of an anesthetic, typically propofol, pentobarbital or thiopental, to cause a temporary coma or a deep state of unconsciousness. This type of coma is used to protect the brain from swelling by reducing the metabolic rate of brain tissue, as well as the cerebral blood flow.

PVS (persistent vegetative state) - a condition where irreversible brain damage is so extensive that any conscious life is forever impossible; only nonconscious/involuntary functions remain.

Brain-dead - a condition in which significant portions of the brain have died (and will not be regenerated). This term it admits of degrees and is therefore controversial.

Definition of death - in medical/legal/ethical struggle to define what exactly constitutes “death” - cessation of heart activity; cessation of breathing; significant brain death; rigor mortis, putrefaction, etc.

Moribund - in a dying state; near death; no longer able to sustain life functions. Intravenous feeding - Supplying fluid and dextrose through a needle inserted into a vein.

Tube feeding - Supplying fluids and nourishment by means of a tube inserted through the nose into the stomach (nasogastric) or directly into the stomach through hole in the stomach wall.

Artificial nutrition and hydration - Supplying fluid (water) and nutrition either intravenously or through a tube to a sick person who cannot receive nutrition and hydration in any other way.

Ventilator (respirator) - a mechanical device which forces air into the lungs when the natural ability to breathe is impeded.

Dialysis - a medical procedure occasioned by the total loss of kidney function whereby the kidney function is performed by an external machine.

Living will - a legal document in which one states one's medical directives in case of incompetency; in New York State the Health Care Proxy precedes the use of the living will.

Health Care Proxy - a piece of legislation of New York State derived from the Fox case, which legalizes the designation of a "proxy" to make medical decisions for someone if he or she becomes incompetent.

Right to Die - a very ambivalent term, originally used to assert the right to refuse unwanted or unnecessary medical treatment but gradually taken over by the assisted suicide movement to establish a "constitutional right to suicide."

Quality-of-life - a relative term with many shades of meaning; used often to justify suicide, that is, when illness or debility lessens one's "quality-of life" and therefore justifies the act of suicide.

Hippocratic oath - an oath, derived from the Greek Hippocrates and sworn by physicians in which they promise not to harm life in any way and to refuse to assist in suicide.

Competent/competency - in law and medicine this refers to the capacity of an adult to direct one's own life and make one's own decisions; someone who is in a coma, intoxicated, debilitated, underage, etc., is considered "incompetent."

Articulo mortis - a Latin expression which is used to indicate when someone is at the point of death.

Principle of the Double Effect - a time honored principle in Western ethics and morality in which there is recognized the following: a good action (rescuing one's neighbor) may have a double effect (the neighbor may be saved and the rescuer may die in the process) one effect is intended (the rescue of the neighbor) and the other fact is not intended (death of the rescuer).

Advance directives - indications that a person makes concerning medical care in case that person becomes incompetent at any time in the medical process; hospitals are required by federal law (Patient Self Determination Act) to ask about a persons (advanced directives) when entering the hospital for medical services.

DNR order - a "do not resuscitate order" is a directive to medical staff not to resuscitate by artificial means an individual whose heart has stopped. Judeo-Christian heritage - a body of philosophical/moral/ethical/legal principles derived from the old and new Testaments (Christian and Jewish Scriptures), which has formed the basis of Western morality.

Right of Self Determination - legal power possessed by an individual to determine the type and extent of one's medical treatment.

Dr. Death - is a derisive term used to describe Dr. Jack Kevorkian who promoted the suicide movement by assisting at the suicides of many persons and making this act public. Kevorkian used his invention the "Thanatron" (which means "death machine") to enable individuals to commit suicide in his presence. The three-bottle device used assorted chemicals to induce death. After allowing 60 Minutes to air a video of one of his assisted suicides he was sentenced to prison and served seven years.

Hospice - the name used for an interdisciplinary program of care that provides palliation as well as emotional support to terminally ill people and their family and friends. A model of care that focuses on relieving symptoms and supporting patients with a life expectancy of six months or less. Hospice involves an interdisciplinary approach to provide medical care, pain management

and emotional and spiritual support. The emphasis is on comfort, not curing. It can be provided in the patient's home as well as freestanding hospice facilities, hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Stem Cell research - In bodily tissues like bone marrow and muscle tissue, adult stem cells generate replacements for bone and muscle cells that are lost through injury, disease or normal wear and tear. A brief list of the ailments that stem cells may someday be used to treat include Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, skin burns, arthritis, birth defects, diabetes and heart disease. Until recently, stem cells were sought through the cloning of embryos for the harvesting of stem cells and then destroying the embryo. Some researchers have also advocated the use of aborted children for this process. The four types of stem cells are: embryonic stem cells, embryonic germ cells, umbilical cord stem cells, and adult stem cells. The Catholic Church only prohibits the use of embryonic stem cells. Some scientists have recently discovered a way to bypass the need of embryonic stem cells as a possible way to cure these diseases.

Eschatology- the study which seeks to ascertain the fate or condition, temporary or eternal, of individual souls, and how far the issues of the future depend on the present life.

Death- "For those who die in Christ's grace it is a participation in the death of the Lord, so that they can also share his Resurrection."(CCC#1006). "Death is the end of earthly life. Our lives are measured by time, in the course of which we change, grow old and, as with all living beings on earth, death seems like the normal end of life. That aspect of death lends urgency to our lives: remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment."(CCC#1007)

Resurrection- The Catholic doctrine that just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day. Heaven- "The ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness." (CCC #1024).

Beatific Vision- "The contemplation of God in His heavenly glory." (CCC #1028). Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it.

Purgatory- The place where " all who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."(CCC#1030).

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Anointing of the Sick- "By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. Indeed, she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and Death of Christ."(*Lumen Gentium* 11).
Illness in Human Life- "Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death. Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes, even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him." (1500-1501).

Christ the Physician- "Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that 'God has visited his people' and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: 'I was sick and you visited me.' His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul.

A Sacrament of the Sick- "The Church believes and confesses that among the seven sacraments there is one especially intended to strengthen those who are being tried by illness, the Anointing of the Sick: This sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. Over the centuries the Anointing of the Sick was conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death. Because of this it received the name "Extreme Unction." Notwithstanding this evolution the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation. The Apostolic Constitution Sacram Unctionem Infirmorum, following upon the Second Vatican Council, established that henceforth, in the Roman Rite, the following be observed: The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with duly blessed oil - pressed from olives or from other plants - saying, only once: 'Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.' (CCC#1511-1513).

How is the Sacrament Celebrated? - "Like all the sacraments the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration, whether it takes place in the family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a whole group of sick persons. It is very fitting to celebrate it within the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's Passover. If circumstances suggest it, the celebration of the sacrament can be preceded by the sacrament of Penance and followed by the sacrament of the Eucharist. The celebration of the sacrament includes the following principal elements: the 'priests of the Church' - in silence - lay hands on the sick; they pray over them in the faith of the Church...they then anoint them with oil blessed, if possible, by the bishop. (CCC#1517-1519).

Effects of the Sacrament- "The first grace of this sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion: in a certain way, he is consecrated to bear fruit by configuration to the Savior's redemptive Passion. Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus. If the sacrament of anointing of the sick is given to all who suffer from serious illness and infirmity, even more rightly is it given to those at the point of departing this life; so it is also called 'The Sacrament of those Departing.'" The Anointing of the Sick completes our conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it. It completes the holy anointings that mark the whole Christian life: that of Baptism which sealed the new life in us, and that of Confirmation which strengthened us for the combat of this life. This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father's house." (CCC#1520-1523).