

Pain relief and palliative care is a human right

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For centuries, medical and surgical treatment has emphasized saving the life of the patient rather than ameliorating the patient's pain, particularly when there were few options for the latter. Today at the dawn of the 21st century, the best available evidence indicates a major gap between an increasingly understanding of the pathophysiology of pain and widespread inadequacy of its treatment. Epidemiologic evidence has proven that chronic pain is a widespread public health issue. Studies of cancer patients' pain control consistently reveal that up to half of patients receive inadequate analgesia and 30% do not receive appropriate drugs for their pain. Pain clinicians advocate a paradigm shift in the medical professions' perspective on pain management, from simply good practice to an imperative founded on patient rights. There is a need to promote policies which create conditions where human beings can bear even incurable illnesses and death in a dignified manner. This must help health professionals or lay groups to initiate a

powerful agenda to reform local statutes. The essential components of such legislation are: reasonable pain management is a right, doctors have a duty to listen to and reasonably respond to a patient's report of pain, provision of necessary pain relief is immune from potential legal liability, doctors who are not able or willing to ensure adequate analgesia must refer to a colleague who has this expertise, pain management must be a compulsory component of continuing medical education. For too long, pain and its management have been prisoners of myth, irrationality, ignorance, and cultural bias. One response to the worldwide under treatment of pain has been to promote the concept that pain relief is a public health issue of such critical importance as to constitute an international imperative and fundamental human right.

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