

Catholic group says neutral stand on assisted suicide ‘startling’

PHILADELPHIA - The president of the Catholic Medical Association said Oct. 18 that the American Academy of Family Physicians’ new “engaged neutrality” position on physician-assisted suicide is “diametrically opposed” to the medical community’s long-standing opposition to it.

“It is quite startling that the AAFP would be so diametrically opposed to the medical community’s historical and long-standing opposition against physician-assisted suicide,” said Dr. Peter T. Morrow in a statement. “It is in direct violation of the ‘do no harm’ Hippocratic Oath.”

Members of the Philadelphia-based Catholic Medical Association “are dedicated to preserving life from conception - not birth - to natural death and will continue to remain staunchly opposed to any form of assisted suicide. It goes against natural law,” he said.

The American Academy of Family Physicians passed a resolution Oct. 9 to “adopt a position on engaged neutrality toward medical-aid-in-dying as a personal end-of-life decision in the context of the physician-patient relationship.”

The academy also rejected using the phrase “assisted suicide” or “physician-assisted suicide” in formal statements or documents and directed its American Medical Association delegation “to promote the same in the AMA House of Delegates.”

The Catholic Medical Association said that leading medical organizations “continue to regard any form of euthanasia at odds with the physician’s role as healer. Many warn that allowing such practices will lead to abuse of the most vulnerable including

the sick and the elderly.”

MedPage Today, an accredited medical news service, reported that American Academy of Family Physicians stated it also would support laws “that protect physicians from criminal prosecution for assisting terminally ill patients in ‘ending their suffering’ in states where such actions are permitted.”

The Catholic Medical Association said several of its members testified at the AMA’s last House of Delegates meeting in June, speaking out against physician-assisted suicide.

The AMA, American College of Physicians and the World Medical Association have all recently reaffirmed their position against physician-assisted suicide.

Dr. Marie-Alberte Boursiquot, an Ellicott City-based internist, is both a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and past national president of the Catholic Medical Association.

“I’m not only surprised, but very disappointed,” she said of the position taken by the American Academy of Family Physicians. “This is opposed to what we do as physicians. It’s opposed to the oath we take, to preserve life, protect life.

“It’s a gross violation of what we do as physicians. It can be terribly destructive of the patient-doctor relationship. The physician is often the only person in someone’s corner.”

Earlier this year, as the Catholic Review reported in April, an expected bill regarding the legalization of physician-assisted suicide was not even introduced in the Maryland General Assembly, in part due to a coalition that annually opposes such a law in the state.

“We have to continue to do what we’ve been doing,” said Boursiquot, a parishioner of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore. “Every time this comes up, a number of my colleagues go to Annapolis to testify against.”

Paul McMullen contributed to this article.