

# COMMITTEE OF PRESIDENTS OF MEDICAL COLLEGES

## POSITION STATEMENT

### End of Life Care

End of life care is health care for people with a terminal illness or terminal disease condition that has become advanced, is typically progressive and incurable.

The Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges comprises members from across all aspects of medicine and College Presidents are committed to ensuring that all Australians have access to safe and appropriate care as they approach the end of their lives. Quality end of life care occurs when there is a partnership between the terminally ill person, their care team and their family, carers and loved ones.

Medical practitioners have an obligation to preserve life and where death is inevitable this should occur with dignity and comfort with adequate relief from pain and suffering. Good medical practice includes not initiating, or continuing life-prolonging measures when that treatment will not result in any benefit or will impose an unacceptable burden on the terminally ill person.

All medical practitioners have a responsibility to effectively, collaboratively and respectfully discuss choices regarding treatment escalation and de-escalation at the end-of-life with patients and their families. All physicians have a responsibility to document the summary and outcome of end of life discussions with patients and/or their families. Expert advice from a palliative care physician may be required.

CPMC strongly supports end of life care because it is patient-centred, coordinated and focused on rational investigation, symptom management and de-prescribing. It involves early identification, assessment and treatment of pain, dyspnoea and other problems (physical, psychosocial, cultural and spiritual)<sup>1</sup>. It enables patients nearing the end of life to live as well as possible, and then to die without unnecessary prolongation of the dying process. For families and loved ones it includes support through the bereavement phase.

CPMC recognises the issues associated with end of life care are complex and is working with the Australian government to address them, including through enhanced education and training for medical practitioners, and the promotion of advanced care directives.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO) website, Definition of Palliative Care – <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/>