

TITLE

Choice in Dying: Current Legal, Policy and Ethical Issues

CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS

4 hours

GOALS

Many patients, particularly at the end of life, do not receive quality care, especially adequate pain control. Palliative care is often not provided and hospice care, if provided, is usually given only in the last weeks or days of life. Additionally, the health care wishes of patients are often not honored and many patients receive treatment that they do not want. Patients who experience terrible suffering may not know of options that could reduce their suffering and allow them to die with dignity, in accordance with their values and wishes. Social workers can play an important role as catalysts for better quality care for patients at the end of life to ensure that their health care wishes are respected. The goals of this class are to inform social workers about the laws, policies, practices, and ethical issues related to end-of-life choices for their patients.

CLASS OUTLINE

1. The under treatment of pain
2. Current laws in the U.S. and in New York State related to end-of-life decision-making and patient rights, including:
 - a. Patient Self-Determination Act
 - b. Health Care Proxy Law
 - c. Family Health Care Decisions Act
 - d. Palliative Care Information Act
 - e. Palliative Care Access Act
3. Advance directives and Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (MOLST)
4. Options for addressing pain and suffering at the end of life, including voluntary stopping eating and drinking, palliative sedation, and the proposed right to aid in dying laws
5. Ethical issues related to end-of-life choices and aid in dying

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Social workers who have taken this course will know:

1. the laws in New York State related to health care decisions and the rights of patients related to choice in end-of-life care;
2. choices available to patients to relieve pain and suffering at the end of life;
3. ethical issues related to relieving pain and suffering at the end of life;
4. how they can provide quality services and advocate for the end-of-life choices of their patients and their families.