

## **JOINT DECLARATION on END OF LIFE AND PALLIATIVE CARE**

By the Pontifical Academy for Life and the World Innovation Summit for Health

While we applaud medical science for advances to prevent and cure disease, we recognize that every life will ultimately end in death. For many, however, death is not considered as an unrewarding journey; it is the passing through a door that opens to eternal life in the hereafter.

### **The Promotion of Palliative Care**

We encourage palliative care to support and provide companionship during illness and at the end of life. The basic philosophy of palliative care is to achieve the best quality of life for patients suffering incurable, progressive illness even when their illness cannot be cured. Palliative care is a health care specialty that is both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivering care. Palliative care services are critical for realizing the most ancient mission of medicine “to care even when it cannot cure.” Palliative care is an expression of the truly human devotion to taking care of one another, especially of those who suffer. We should encourage professionals and students to specialize in this type of assistance which is no less valuable though it may not be considered “life-saving.” Palliative care accomplishes something vitally important: it values the person.

Noting that the scriptures of faith traditions emphasize divine purpose for all persons, regardless of health, we proclaim that:

- We reject any form of pressure upon the dying to end their lives.
- We encourage and support the concept of palliative care in all places and for everyone.
- We affirm laws and policies that protect the rights and dignity of the dying.
- Even when staving off death seems futile or unreasonably burdensome to continue, we must seek to offer comfort care: effective pain relief, companionship, and support the patient in the hard and sacred work of preparing for death.
- We as a society must assure that patients’ desire not to be a burden does not tempt them to choose death rather than receiving the care and support that could enable them to live out their remaining time in comfort and peace.
- We believe that all health care workers are bound to create the conditions by which religious assistance is assured to anyone who asks for it, either expressly or implicitly
- We commit to using our knowledge and research to shape policies that encompass social, physical and spiritual care to provide more informed care for those facing grave illness and death.
- We commit to engaging the community regarding the issues of bioethics as well as the techniques of compassionate companionship for those who are suffering and dying.
- We commit to raise public awareness about palliative care through teaching resources and adult programs to consider treatments for the suffering and the dying in the context of religious affirmations of God’s providence and hope.
- We commit to providing succor to the family and loved ones of the dying

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