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**As I-1000 Signatures are Counted, Washington State Medical Association
Opposition to Physician-Assisted Suicide Reiterated**

SEATTLE - The Washington State Medical Association (WSMA) opposes Initiative-1000, the measure to legalize physician-assisted suicide in Washington state. The opposition was emphatically voted on at the WSMA's annual meeting last year.

"We believe physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the role of physicians as healers," said WSMA President Brian P. Wicks, MD. "Patients put their trust in physicians and that bond of trust would be irrevocably harmed by the provisions of this dangerous initiative."

The WSMA has opposed assisted suicide since 1991 when a similar initiative was proposed and defeated. The state medical associations in 49 states oppose assisted suicide and the Oregon Medical Association supported repeal of the state's "Death with Dignity Act" in 1997, characterizing it as "fundamentally flawed." Washington's Initiative-1000 is virtually identical to this flawed Act. The American Medical Association is also opposed to physician-assisted suicide.

"Initiative-1000 gives doctors power which we do not want and which we believe is contrary to good medical practice," said Wicks. "The initiative is a dangerous distraction from symptom-directed end-of-life care that provides comfort for dying patients and their families. Our focus should remain on caring for terminally ill patients and should never shift toward helping them kill themselves."

I-1000 has some special problems that should worry even those not opposed to assisted suicide in principle, according to Wicks.

"Under I-1000, if a physician prescribes a lethal overdose, when that physician completes the death certificate, he or she is required--actually required--to list the underlying disease (say lung cancer) as the cause of death, even when the doctor knows full well that the patient died due to the suicidal overdose he or she prescribed," Wicks said. "To my knowledge, there's no other situation in medicine in which the death certificate is deliberately falsified--and in which this falsification is mandated by law."

The Secretary of State's office is in the process of counting signatures submitted by Initiative-1000 proponents and will know soon whether enough signatures were collected to put the initiative on the November ballot.

The proposed initiative would allow doctors to prescribe a lethal overdose of barbiturates or other drugs to patients over 17 years old who a physician believes to have a life expectancy of six months or less.

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