







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Survey of doctors' opinions of the legalisation of physician assisted suicide

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Abstract

Background

Assisted dying has wide support among the general population but there is evidence that those providing care for the dying may be less supportive. Senior doctors would be involved in implementing the proposed change in the law. We aimed to measure support for legalising physician assisted dying in a representative sample of senior doctors in England and Wales, and to assess any association between doctors' characteristics and level of support for a change in the law.

Methods

We conducted a postal survey of 1000 consultants and general practitioners randomly selected from a commercially available database. The main outcome of interest was level of agreement with any change in the law to allow physician assisted suicide.

Results

The corrected participation rate was 50%. We analysed 372 questionnaires. Respondents' views were divided: 39% were in favour of a change to the law to allow assisted suicide, 49% opposed a change and 12% neither agreed nor disagreed. Doctors who reported caring for the dying were less likely to support a change in the law. Religious belief was also associated with opposition. Gender, specialty and years in post had no significant effect.

Conclusion

More senior doctors in England and Wales oppose any step towards the legalisation of assisted dying than support this. Doctors who care for the dying were more opposed. This has implications for the ease of implementation of recently proposed legislation.

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