

Publication

"We need to talk!" Barriers to GPs' communication about the option of physician-assisted suicide and their ethical implications: results from a qualitative study

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GPs usually care for their patients for an extended period of time, therefore, requests to not only discontinue a patient's treatment but to assist a patient in a suicide are likely to create intensely stressful situations for physicians. However, in order to ensure the best patient care possible, the competent communication about the option of physician assisted suicide (PAS) as well as the assessment of the origin and sincerity of the request are very important. This is especially true, since patients' requests for PAS can also be an indicator for unmet needs or concerns. Twenty-three qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to in-depth explore this multifaceted, complex topic while enabling GPs to express possible difficulties when being asked for assistance. The analysis of the gathered data shows three main themes why GPs may find it difficult to professionally communicate about PAS: concerns for their own psychological well-being, conflicting personal values or their understanding of their professional role. In the discussion part of this paper we re-assess these different themes in order to ethically discuss and analyse how potential barriers to professional communication concerning PAS could be overcome.

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