

Talking With Your Doctor About Medical Aid in Dying in the District of Columbia

FS -D.C.'s Death with Dignity Act allows physicians to prescribe medication for their terminally ill patients to bring about peaceful deaths under strict guidelines. If you think you may ever want to access medical aid in dying, you want to make sure your doctor will support your choices. Discuss your end-of-life priorities with your medical team now to ensure the options you want will be available to you. Below are some suggestions for the conversation.

Conversation starters if you do not have a terminal illness

I value quality of life. If I become terminally ill and am no longer able to enjoy living, I would like to have the option of medical aid in dying.

I hope you will honor my decisions and respect my values, as I respect yours. Would you write a prescription for aid-in-dying medication in accordance with the law if I qualify? If you will never be willing to honor my request, please tell me now.

Conversation starters if you do have a terminal illness

I want to have the authorized option to self-administer medication to bring about a peaceful death if my suffering becomes unbearable.

Medical Aid in Dying

Medical aid in dying is a safe and trusted medical practice in which a terminally ill, mentally capable adult with a prognosis of six months or less to live may request from their doctor a prescription for medication which they can choose to self-ingest to end suffering and bring about a peaceful death.

Am I eligible for medical aid in dying? If yes, will you write a prescription in accordance with the District of Columbia's Death with Dignity Act? If not, will you refer me to a doctor who is willing to write a prescription?

If I am not eligible, what will my condition look like when I am eligible?

Remember: No one but you can make this request to your doctor(s). And it is important to *ask only your doctor*, do not ask your physician's office staff, nurse or physician's assistant, or leave a request on voicemail.

You may mention that Compassion & Choices provides assistance to physicians through our Doc2Doc Program, which offers free, confidential telephone consultation with a seasoned medical director.

Please feel free to give your physician our Doc2Doc flier or the Doc2Doc phone number: 800.247.7421.

Eligibility Requirements of the District of Columbia Death With Dignity Act

Eligibility

To be eligible to use the law, an individual must be:

- Age 18 or older
- Diagnosed with a terminal illness
- Given six months or less to live
- Capable of making healthcare decisions
- A resident of the District of Columbia
- Capable of self-administering and ingesting the aid-in-dying medication
- Fully informed of all their end-of-life options.

Please note that eligibility to use the medical aid in dying law is not the same as eligibility for hospice.

Physician Confirmation

Two D.C. physicians must agree that you are eligible to use the D.C. Death with Dignity Act. One physician prescribes the medication, and the other physician gives a consulting opinion. If either physician is unable to determine your mental capacity in making the request, a mental health professional (psychiatrist or psychologist) must evaluate you and ensure that you are capable of making your own healthcare decisions.

You may change your mind at any time. You may at any time withdraw or rescind your request for a prescription for medical aid in dying, and there is no obligation to take the medication once you have it in your possession.

For More Information

To learn more about the full range of end-of-life options please visit:

CompassionAndChoices.org/information.

To learn more about the District of Columbia Death With Dignity Act and its requirements, the DC Department of Health offers information and forms on its website:

<https://doh.dc.gov/page/death-dignity-act-2016>.