

Table 1. Characteristics and end-of-life care of 341 DWDA patients who died after ingesting a lethal dose of medication, Oregon, 1998-2007

Characteristics	2007 (N = 49)		1998-2006 (N= 292)		Total (N = 341)	
	N	(%)*	N	(%)*	N	(%)*
Sex						
Male (%)	26	(53.1)	157	(53.8)	183	(53.7)
Female (%)	23	(46.9)	135	(46.2)	158	(46.3)
Age						
18-34 (%)	1	(2.0)	3	(1.0)	4	(1.2)
35-44 (%)	2	(4.1)	8	(2.7)	10	(2.9)
45-54 (%)	3	(6.1)	28	(9.6)	31	(9.1)
55-64 (%)	18	(36.7)	55	(18.8)	73	(21.4)
65-74 (%)	10	(20.4)	83	(28.4)	93	(27.3)
75-84 (%)	11	(22.4)	87	(29.8)	98	(28.7)
85+ (%)	4	(8.2)	28	(9.6)	32	(9.4)
Median years (range)	65	(29-93)	70	(25-96)	69	(25-96)
Race						
White (%)	48	(98.0)	284	(97.3)	332	(97.4)
Asian (%)	0	(0.0)	6	(2.1)	6	(1.8)
American Indian (%)	0	(0.0)	1	(0.3)	1	(0.3)
Hispanic (%)	1	(2.0)	1	(0.3)	2	(0.6)
African American	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)
Other	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)
Marital status						
Married (%)	21	(42.9)	133	(45.5)	154	(45.2)
Widowed (%)	10	(20.4)	63	(21.6)	73	(21.4)
Divorced (%)	12	(24.5)	74	(25.3)	86	(25.2)
Never married (%)	6	(12.2)	22	(7.5)	28	(8.2)
Education						
Less than high school (%)	2	(4.1)	25	(8.6)	27	(7.9)
High school graduate (%)	13	(26.5)	82	(28.1)	95	(27.9)
Some college (%)	15	(30.6)	64	(21.9)	79	(23.2)
Baccalaureate (%)	11	(22.4)	60	(20.5)	71	(20.8)
Postbaccalaureate (%)	8	(16.3)	61	(20.9)	69	(20.2)
Residence						
Metro counties (%) ^Δ	27	(55.1)	113	(38.7)	140	(41.1)
Coastal counties (%) ⁺	4	(8.2)	21	(7.2)	25	(7.3)
Other western counties (%)	15	(30.6)	136	(46.6)	151	(44.3)
East of the Cascades (%)	3	(6.1)	22	(7.5)	25	(7.3)
Underlying illness						
Neoplasms, all forms (%)	42	(85.7)	238	(81.5)	280	(82.1)
Lung and bronchus (%)	11	(22.4)	54	(18.5)	65	(19.1)
Pancreas (%)	3	(6.1)	27	(9.2)	30	(8.8)
Breast (%)	5	(10.2)	25	(8.6)	30	(8.8)
Colon (%)	4	(8.2)	19	(6.5)	23	(6.7)
Prostate	5	(10.2)	15	(5.1)	20	(5.9)
Other (%)	14	(28.6)	98	(33.6)	112	(32.8)
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (%)	3	(6.1)	23	(7.9)	26	(7.6)
Chronic lower respiratory disease (%)	3	(6.1)	12	(4.1)	15	(4.4)
HIV/AIDS (%)	1	(2.0)	6	(2.1)	7	(2.1)
Heart disease (%)	0	(0.0)	5	(1.7)	5	(1.5)
Other illnesses listed below (%) ^Ψ	0	(0.0)	8	(2.7)	8	(2.3)

End-of-Life Care			
Hospice			
Enrolled (%)	43 (87.8)	248 (85.5)	291 (85.8)
Not enrolled (%)	6 (12.2)	42 (14.5)	48 (14.2)
<i>Unknown</i>	-	2	2
Insurance			
Private (%)	32 (65.3)	180 (62.5)	212 (62.9)
Medicare or Medicaid (%)	17 (34.7)	105 (36.5)	122 (36.2)
None (%)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.0)	3 (0.9)
<i>Unknown</i>	0	4	4
End-of-life Concerns*			
Losing autonomy (%)	49 (100)	251 (87.2)	300 (89.0)
Less able to engage in activities making life enjoyable (%)	42 (85.7)	250 (86.8)	292 (86.6)
Loss of dignity (%) ^o	42 (85.7)	131 (80.4)	173 (81.6)
Losing control of bodily functions (%)	31 (63.3)	165 (57.3)	196 (58.2)
Burden on family, friends/caregivers (%)	22 (44.9)	110 (38.2)	132 (39.2)
Inadequate pain control or concern about it (%)	16 (32.7)	76 (26.4)	92 (27.3)
Financial implications of treatment (%)	2 (4.1)	7 (2.4)	9 (2.7)
PAS Process			
Referred for psychiatric evaluation (%)	0 (0.0)	36 (12.6)	36 (10.7)
Patient informed family of decision (%)**	46 (93.9)	207 (94.5)	253 (94.4)
Patient died at			
Home (patient, family or friend) (%)	44 (89.8)	275 (94.2)	319 (93.5)
Long term care, assisted living or foster care facility (%)	4 (8.2)	13 (4.5)	17 (5.0)
Hospital (%)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
Other (%)	1 (2.0)	3 (1.0)	4 (1.2)
Lethal Medication			
Secobarbital (%)	40 (81.6)	135 (46.2)	175 (51.3)
Pentobarbital (%)	9 (18.4)	152 (52.1)	161 (47.2)
Other (%) ^{ΔΔ}	0 (0.0)	5 (1.7)	5 (1.5)
Health-care Provider Present When Medication Ingested**			
Prescribing physician (%)	11 (22.4)	63 (29.2)	74 (27.9)
Other provider, prescribing physician not present (%)	25 (51.0)	115 (53.2)	140 (52.8)
No provider (%)	13 (26.5)	38 (17.6)	51 (19.2)
<i>Unknown</i>	0	6	6
Complications			
Regurgitated (%)	3 (6.3)	16 (5.6)	19 (5.7)
Seizures (%)	0 -	0 -	0 -
Awakened after taking prescribed medication (%) ψψ	0	1	1
None (%)	46 (93.8)	269 (94.4)	314 (94.3)
<i>Unknown</i>	0	8	8
Emergency Medical Services			
Called for intervention after lethal medication ingested (%)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Calls for other reasons (%) ^{###}	0 (0)	4 (1.4)	4 (1.2)
Not called after lethal medication ingested (%)	49 (100)	284 (98.6)	333 (98.8)
<i>Unknown</i>	-	4	4
Timing of PAS Event			
Duration (weeks) of patient-physician relationship			
Median	8	12	11
Range	0-1440	0-1065	0-1440
<i>Unknown</i>	2	16	18

Duration (days) between prescription written and death			
Median	14	6	7
Range	0-463	0-698	0-698
Minutes between ingestion and unconsciousness			
Median	5	5	5
Range	1-20	1-38	1-38
<i>Unknown</i>	3	28	31
Minutes between ingestion and death			
Median	25	25	25
Range (minutes - hours)	6 min-83 hrs	1 min-48 hrs	1 min-83 hrs
<i>Unknown</i>	5	20	25

* Unknowns are excluded when calculating percentages.

△ Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties.

+ Excluding Douglas and Lane counties.

ψ Includes alcoholic hepatic failure, corticobasal degeneration, diabetes mellitus with renal complications, hepatitis C, organ-limited amyloidosis, scleroderma, and Shy-Drager syndrome.

Affirmative answers only ("Don't know" included in negative answers). Available for 17 patients in 2001.

° First asked beginning in 2003.

** First recorded beginning in 2001. Since then, 10 patients (3.7%) have chosen not to inform their families and five patients (1.9%) have had no families to inform.

△△ Other includes combinations of secobarbital, pentobarbital, and/or morphine.

++ The data shown are for 2001-2007 since information about the presence of a health care provider/volunteer, in the absence of the prescribing physician, was first collected in 2001.

ψψ In 2005, one patient regained consciousness 65 hours after ingesting the medications, subsequently dying from his/her illness 2 weeks after awakening. The complication is recorded here but the patient is not otherwise included in the total number of DWDA deaths.

Calls included three to pronounce death and one to help a patient who had fallen off a sofa.