



**ALLEGHENY COUNTY
MEDICAL SOCIETY**

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Easing the Inevitable—Improving End-of-Life Care

The recommendations of the Task Force for Quality at the End-of-Life to Governor Ed Rendell on improving end-of-life care are significant—are extensive with 160 enumerated points. As a body of physicians, the Allegheny County Medical Society recognizes that many health care providers are untrained in discussing end-of-life issues with patients and their families. The ACMS has and will continue to support efforts to provide education in palliative and terminal care to physicians, nurses, and allied health providers.

Imperative to the improvement of end-of-life care is updating advanced directive laws to standardize and simplify the process and to better define criteria for terminal illness and the roles of a patient's decision maker. Also important is the recommendation that the Pennsylvania Department of Health adopt a portable form that would transfer with each patient throughout the health care system, so that a person's directives are not lost among various providers.

Perhaps the most needed action is educating the citizens of the Commonwealth about advanced care directives, palliative care, and end-of-life decision making. In this regard, physicians can play a major role by communicating with patients and families regarding care decisions. Chronic illness and death are difficult subjects for many people to discuss. However, it is important for patients and physicians to engage in conversation about advanced care planning.

Although the recommendations are ambitious, the predominant goals of statewide standardization, communication, and education are key to making a person's last experiences comfortable and dignified according to his or her wishes.

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The Allegheny County Medical Society has 2,500 physician members from all specialties and is dedicated to providing leadership and advocacy on healthcare issues for the community and physicians. The organization has been serving Allegheny County since 1865. For more information, please contact ACMS at 412-321-5030 or acms@acms.org.