

Table 1. Characteristics and end-of-life care of 401 DWDA patients who died after ingesting a lethal dose of medication, by year, Oregon, 1998-2008

Characteristics	2008 (N = 60)	1998-2007 (N= 341)	Total (N = 401)
Sex			
Male (%)	N (%)*	N (%)*	N (%)*
Female (%)	30 (50.0)	183 (53.7)	213 (53.1)
	30 (50.0)	158 (46.3)	158 (46.9)
Age			
18-34 (%)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.2)	4 (1.0)
35-44 (%)	1 (1.7)	10 (2.9)	11 (2.7)
45-54 (%)	1 (1.7)	31 (9.1)	32 (8.0)
55-64 (%)	12 (20.0)	73 (21.4)	85 (21.2)
65-74 (%)	21 (35.0)	93 (27.3)	114 (28.4)
75-84 (%)	14 (23.3)	98 (28.7)	112 (27.9)
85+ (%)	11 (18.3)	32 (9.4)	43 (10.7)
Median years (range)	72 (44-93)	69 (25-96)	70 (25-96)
Race			
White (%)	59 (98.3)	332 (97.4)	391 (97.5)
Asian (%)	1 (1.7)	6 (1.8)	7 (1.7)
American Indian (%)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.2)
Hispanic (%)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.6)	2 (0.5)
African American (%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Other (%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Marital status			
Married (%)	31 (51.7)	154 (45.2)	185 (46.1)
Widowed (%)	12 (20.0)	73 (21.4)	85 (21.2)
Divorced (%)	10 (16.7)	86 (25.2)	96 (23.9)
Never married (%)	7 (11.7)	28 (8.2)	35 (8.7)
Education			
Less than high school (%)	3 (5.0)	27 (7.9)	30 (7.5)
High school graduate (%)	8 (13.3)	95 (27.9)	103 (25.7)
Some college (%)	13 (21.7)	79 (23.2)	92 (22.9)
Baccalaureate or higher (%)	36 (60.0)	140 (41.1)	176 (43.9)
Residence			
Metro counties (%) ^Δ	29 (48.3)	140 (41.1)	169 (42.1)
Coastal counties (%)	5 (8.3)	25 (7.3)	30 (7.5)
Other western counties (%)	19 (31.7)	151 (44.3)	170 (42.4)
East of the Cascades (%)	7 (11.7)	25 7.3)	32 (8.0)
Underlying illness			
Malignant neoplasms (%)	48 (80.0)	280 (82.1)	328 (81.8)
Lung and bronchus (%)	14 (29.2)	65 (19.1)	79 (19.7)
Pancreas (%)	3 (6.3)	30 (8.8)	33 (8.2)
Breast (%)	5 (10.4)	30 (8.8)	35 (8.7)
Colon (%)	4 (8.3)	23 (6.7)	27 (6.7)
Prostate (%)	3 (6.3)	20 (5.9)	23 (5.7)
Other (%)	19 (39.6)	112 (32.8)	131 (32.7)
Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (%)	4 (6.7)	26 (7.6)	30 (7.5)
Chronic lower respiratory disease (%)	4 (6.7)	15 (4.4)	19 (4.7)
HIV/AIDS (%)	1 (1.7)	7 (2.1)	8 (2.0)
Heart Disease	1 (1.7)	5 (1.5)	6 (1.5)
Illnesses listed below (%) ^Ψ	2 (3.3)	8 (2.3)	10 (2.5)

End of Life Care			
Hospice			
Enrolled (%)	59 (98.3)	291 (85.8)	350 (87.7)
Not enrolled (%)	1 (1.7)	48 (14.2)	49 (12.3)
<i>Unknown</i>	-	2	2
Insurance			
Private (%)	53 (88.3)	212 (62.9)	265 (66.8)
Medicare or Medicaid (%) ^Ω	5 (8.3)	122 (36.2)	127 (32.0)
None (%)	2 (3.3)	3 (0.9)	5 (1.3)
<i>Unknown</i>	-	4	4
End-of-life Concerns[#]			
Losing autonomy (%)	57 (95.0)	300 (89.0)	357 (89.9)
Less able to engage in activities making life enjoyable (%)	55 (91.7)	292 (86.6)	347 (87.4)
Loss of dignity (%) ^ε	55 (91.7)	173 (81.6)	228 (83.8)
Losing control of bodily functions (%)	37 (61.7)	196 (58.2)	233 (58.7)
Burden on family, friends/caregivers (%)	20 (33.3)	132 (39.2)	152 (38.3)
Inadequate pain control or concern about it (%)	3 (5.0)	92 (27.3)	95 (23.9)
Financial implications of treatment (%)	2 (3.3)	9 (2.7)	11 (2.8)
DWDA Process			
Referred for psychiatric evaluation (%)	2 (3.3)	36 (10.7)	38 (9.6)
Patient informed family of decision (%)**	56 (93.3)	253 (94.4)	309 (94.2)
Patient died at			
Home (patient, family or friend) (%)	58 (96.7)	319 (93.5)	377 (94.0)
Long term care, assisted living or foster care facility (%)	2 (3.3)	17 (5.0)	19 (4.7)
Hospital (%)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.2)
Other (%)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.2)	4 (1.0)
Lethal Medication			
Secobarbital (%)	35 (58.3)	175 (51.6)	210 (52.6)
Pentobarbital (%)	25 (41.7)	161 (47.2)	186 (46.4)
Other (%) ^{ΔΔ}	0 (0.0)	5 (1.2)	5 (1.0)
Health-care Provider Present When Medication Ingested**			
Prescribing physician (%)	11 (18.3)	74 (27.3)	85 (25.7)
Other provider, prescribing physician not present (%)	40 (70.2)	140 (52.8)	180 (55.9)
No provider (%)	6 (10.5)	51 (19.2)	57 (17.7)
<i>Unknown</i>	3	6	9
Complications			
Regurgitated (%)	0 (0.0)	19 (5.7)	19 (4.9)
Seizures (%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Awakened after taking prescribed medication (%)	0	1 ^(ψψ)	1 ^(ψψ)
None (%)	58 (100.0)	314 (94.3)	372 (95.1)
<i>Unknown</i>	2	8	10
Emergency Medical Services			
Called for intervention after lethal medication ingested (%)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Calls for other reasons (%) ^{##}	0 (0.0)	4 (1.2)	4 (1.0)
Not called after lethal medication ingested (%)	60 (100)	337 (98.8)	397 (99.0)
<i>Unknown</i>	-	4	4
Timing of DWDA Event			
Duration (weeks) of patient-physician relationship			
Median	8	12	10
Range	0-916	0-1440	0-1440
<i>Unknown</i>	1	18	19

Duration (days) between 1 st request and death			
Median	42	43	43
Range	15-436	15-1009	15-1009
Minutes between ingestion and unconsciousness			
Median	5	5	5
Range	1-20	1-38	1-38
<i>Unknown</i>	5	24	28
Minutes between ingestion and death			
Median	15	25	25
Range (minutes - hours)	2 min-25 hrs	4 min-48 hrs	1 min-48 hrs
<i>Unknown</i>	6	25	31

* Unknowns are excluded when calculating percentages.

Δ Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties.

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

Ω As only form of health insurance coverage.

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

^e First asked in 2003.

** First recorded beginning in 2001. Since then, 12 patients (3.7%) have chosen not to inform their families and 7 patients (2.1%) have had no family to inform.

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

++ The data shown are for 2001-2008 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 their illness 14 days 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.