



Department of Human Services DHS news release

DHS news release

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No authority to investigate Death with Dignity case, DHS says

The Oregon Department of Human Services has no authority to investigate individual Death with Dignity cases, officials said Friday.

The state law authorizing physician-assisted suicide neither requires nor authorizes investigations by DHS, said Barry S. Kast, DHS assistant director for health services.

"DHS' role is that of a steward of data about the use of the law," Kast said. "This is a law, not a DHS program, and our only legal role is to report accurate aggregate data about the use of the law."

The question was raised by news reports about an Oregon man who regained consciousness after taking a lethal dose of medication prescribed under the law.

Kast said the state boards of medical examiners and pharmacy have authority to investigate medical cases under certain circumstances, although he said the state's physician-assisted suicide law doesn't require them to investigate.

In its annual reports, available on its Web site, DHS reports aggregate data such as the number of people who used the law, underlying diseases and demographics. DHS is prohibited by federal law from reporting medical information about specific patients either living or dead, Kast said. DHS reports data every March, and will release the seventh annual report on March 10.