Nursing Attitudes Toward Physician Assisted Suicide
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Background
Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) spans to numerous countries worldwide and impacts individuals of varying ethnicity, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs. The concept is multifaceted and controversial, causing individuals to possess unique impassioned opinions about it. Nurses, who care for the diseased and dying, are limited by practice guidelines to follow protocols and implement patient directives, but may develop their own personal beliefs about an individual's right to die. Nurse’s mindfulness and ability to hone in on the present moment, or lack thereof, may influence their attitude toward PAS. In the Fall of 2015, the End of Life Option Act was signed into law in California, making it the 5th state to legalize PAS. Similar legislation in 17 states is being introduced. Traditionally, nursing theories have focused on health promotion, which is limiting when applied to an individual's right to end their life. The Human Becoming Theory of Nursing, developed by Rosmarie Parse, focused on an individual’s quality of life being based on their own unique perspective. When care for the patient is a reflection of their own desires, a patient-perspective nursing process emerges and becomes the core of the care directives for that individual. Ultimately, this process allows the nurse to be with the patient, rather then “fix” the patient.

AIMS
The American Nurses Association, the major body representing nurses in the country, has officially taken a stance against PAS despite it’s legality in California. The attitudes of nurses needs to be identified, studied, and compared to the ANA’s formal opposition.
1. Explore the relationship between mindfulness in nurses and attitudes toward PAS.
2. Identify any demographic correlations between subjects and attitudes toward PAS.

Methodology
This study used a non-experimental, observational, cross-sectional design. A convenience sample of 50 pre-licensure and 32 post-licensure nurses were surveyed on attitudes toward euthanasia, mindfulness, and demographic details. Participants were comprised of undergraduate and graduate nursing students at SDSU, as well as SDSU nursing faculty.

Instruments & Analysis
Two validated survey tools were used for data collection:
1. Attitudes Towards Euthanasia (ATE) Scale
2. Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)
Both survey tools use Likert scale questions to produce scores indicating degree of acceptance of euthanasia, and mindfulness, respectively. Descriptive, correlational, and between-group analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software.

Results
- Bivariate correlation testing revealed the correlation between mindfulness scores and attitudes toward PAS was not statistically significant (r(88) = .03, p = .788).
- Attitude toward PAS scores were significantly higher in participants affiliating with atheist beliefs (M = 36.33, SD = 6.25), compared to participants reporting affiliation with Christian beliefs (M = 29.52, SD = 8.44), p = .034.
- The same scores were significantly higher in participants reporting Democratic affiliation (M = 34.29, SD = 6.45), compared to the participants reporting Republican affiliation, M = 26.7, SD = 9.10, p = .003.(CI 2.16, 12.89).
- No significant difference in mean ATE scores was found between prelicensure and postlicensure nursing students.

Implications
- This study did not find a significant relationship between ATE and mindfulness, suggesting other factors contribute to attitudes towards PAS.
- Religious and political factors may have more influence on nurses attitudes towards PAS than experience.
- More research is needed to asses nurses’ perceptions of PAS and how they relates to the ANA’s stance.
- In ethical debates about PAS, nurses are seldom given much thought, yet it is a topic that greatly affects them.
- Nurses need a framework to assist them in making ethical decisions that honor individual patient differences related to PAS.

References