

[AMA Changes Rules of Death](#)

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Death and dying. They're subjects man has pondered and argued about for millennia. Most recently the American Medical Association has been forced by the growing sophistication of medical technology to enter the fray.

For the first time, the prestigious AMA is officially supporting those who seek to have the feeding tubes of comatose or "vegetative state" wives, husbands and other relatives taken away (which soon and inevitably results in the patient's death). The 7-member AMA council has ruled unanimously that it now ethical for doctors to withhold "all means of life-prolonging medical treatment," including food and water, if a patient is in a coma that "is beyond doubt irreversible and there are adequate safeguards to confirm the accuracy of diagnosis." Death, it is noted, need not be imminent for food and water to be stopped. Such a radical shift of policy will impact America's large number of Indian doctors and nurses.

The AMA has always been four-square against even indirect forms of euthanasia - a word assiduously avoided in these discussions. Giving doctors such powers is disquieting to some, who note that out of a population of 400,000 physicians there may conservatively be "20-30,000 bad or impaired doctors." That errors will certainly be made is frightening. Still, society must somehow cope with the problem: a growing number of patients who are dead by most modern definitions, but can be kept on expensive support systems for years, even decades.

There is a new movement afoot, sometimes called "the right to die" or "dying with dignity." More and more people fear they may end up in a remote clinical cell, unconscious, helpless, dead but kept warm by pumps and fed by tubes. They insist that they and their families should make decisions about death under such circumstances. But it's not a clear-cut issue by any means. Dr. Leo Alexander, a medical philosopher, wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine, "It is much like Germany in the 20's and 30's, the barriers against killing are coming down."

Hinduism Today is researching the broader field for a major article on death and dying from the traditional Hindu perspective. Any sources or insights from our readers would be most welcome.