

August 3, 1998

Dear Representative:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our opposition to HR 4006, the "Lethal Drug Abuse Prevention Act".

This legislation will seriously harm patient care. Many patients with terminal illnesses suffer debilitating pain every day. The foundation of good end of life care for these patients includes appropriate pain relief. Unfortunately, as recently noted by the Institute of Medicine, pain is currently undertreated, in part because of the existing laws and regulations.

We are concerned that the proposed bill will exacerbate this problem. Faced with the possibility of a Drug Enforcement Administration investigation, physicians will be hesitant to prescribe, and pharmacists will be hesitant to dispense, large doses of narcotics. Patients who are in the most pain, and therefore in need of the largest doses of narcotics, are the most likely to be affected.

An additional concern is that the bill threatens a patient's right to privacy since any government review of a physician's action will require the physician to disclose details of patient care that should be held in confidence.

Improving end-of-life care is a priority for all our organizations. In its attempt to prevent certain behavior, HR 4006 will have the opposite effect. Rather than passing the proposed bill, therefore, we urge the Congress to engage in a meaningful and thoughtful debate on this complex issue. Our organizations stand ready to work with the Congress as it undertakes this task.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American College of Physicians--American Society of Internal Medicine
Americans for Better Care of the Dying
American Medical Association
American Pharmaceutical Association
National Hospice Organization
Choice in Dying
American Geriatrics Society
American Society of Health System Pharmacists
National Chronic Care Consortium
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry