

Facing Death, Most U.S. Doctors Would Decline Extraordinary Measures



WEDNESDAY, May 28, 2014 (HealthDay News) -- Most American doctors would decline aggressive treatment if they were dying, a new study finds.

Researchers looked at the responses of nearly 1,100 doctors in California who took part in a 2013 survey about their end-of-life care preferences and 790 doctors in Arkansas who completed a similar survey in 1989.

Although conducted decades apart, both surveys yielded similar findings. Most doctors (88 percent in the 2013 survey) would give do-not-resuscitate orders if they were terminally ill, according to the study published May 28 in the journal *PLoS One*.

Even though most doctors don't want extraordinary measures to keep them alive if they are dying, they tend to order aggressive, life-prolonging treatment for terminally ill patients, the Stanford University School of Medicine researchers said.

Further research is needed to understand this discrepancy, said study author Dr. V.J. Periyakoil, a clinical associate professor of medicine at Stanford.

"Why do we physicians choose to pursue such aggressive treatment for our patients when we wouldn't choose it for ourselves? The reasons likely are multifaceted and complex," Periyakoil said in a university news release.

She is director of the Stanford Palliative Care Education and Training Program and associate director of palliative care services at the Palo Alto VA Center in California.

Most Americans say they would prefer to die at home without life-prolonging treatments, according to the study authors.

"A big disparity exists between what Americans say they want at the end of life and the care they actually receive," the researchers wrote. "More than 80 percent of patients say that they wish to avoid hospitalizations and high-intensity care at the end of life, but their wishes are often overridden."

-- Robert Preidt