

## FACTSHEET 06: Definitions and Terminology

1. Euthanasia means the act of bringing about a good death, ie one that is quick, peaceful and in the interests of the person concerned. Voluntary euthanasia thus means a quick and peaceful death brought about at the express wish of that person. SAVES advocates voluntary euthanasia only by a doctor acting in accordance with prescribed safeguards. Consequently SAVES defines voluntary euthanasia as follows:

*A quick and peaceful death brought about under medical supervision at the request of and in the interests of a patient in which prescribed safeguards are followed.*

2. The definition applies to a person who is hopelessly ill with no other prospect of relief from suffering which that person finds intolerable.
3. The following terms frequently arise in the voluntary euthanasia debate:
  - (a) Passive (Voluntary/non-voluntary) Euthanasia - withholding or withdrawing life sustaining treatment either:
    - (i) because it is unduly burdensome and/or medically futile, or
    - (ii) in order to bring about death.

Neither is properly described as passive because both require a positive decision. Neither will necessarily result in a good death nor necessarily reflect the wishes of the patient.

Furthermore (i) is not actually "euthanasia". In addition action under (ii) can be claimed to be action under (i) - or the doctor may have a dual purpose. Passive (voluntary) euthanasia is thus a confusing term. Its use is best avoided.

(b) Double Effect - a term used to deny responsibility where death is foreseen but claimed to be the unintended consequence of treatment to relieve pain or other symptoms. Reliance on intention in the mind of the doctor provides no sure guide in public policy. Moral responsibility cannot be reasonably denied where the outcome is foreseen. See also [Fact Sheet 23](#) - The Principle of Double Effect.

(c) Medical/Physician Assisted Dying - provision of medication to enable a patient to bring about his or her own death under medical supervision;

(d) Active Voluntary Euthanasia - administration by a doctor of medication designed to bring about death at the request of a patient.

4. The various ways in which death may be hastened are different in practical terms and may well be perceived differently by different people. However, they are morally equivalent when the purpose or foreseen and accepted effect is to bring about death as the only means of relieving serious suffering while respecting the patient's wishes. They all involve positive actions by the doctor and the same safeguards should apply in their practice.