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#### DEATH WITH DIGNITY PRELIMINARY REPORT ISSUED

(PORTLAND) Oregon's Death with Dignity Act went into effect in November 1997, and today health officials announced that the deaths of 10 persons who obtained prescriptions for lethal medications under the Act have been reported to the Oregon Health Services.

Of these first 10 persons obtaining prescriptions, eight died after taking the medication while two did not take the medication, but rather died directly from their terminal illness, according to Dr. Katrina Hedberg, Medical Epidemiologist. All 10 reports received by the Health Services documented full compliance with the provisions of the Act, she said. Their physicians judged all 10 persons as capable of making and communicating health care decisions. All received a medical evaluation by a second physician to confirm the diagnosis and terminal prognosis, and all complied with the mandated 15-day waiting period between the first and second requests for a prescription for lethal medication.

Most of the deaths occurred during the last three to four months. The average age of those obtaining prescriptions was 71 years. Cancer was the underlying terminal illness for nine persons and one had heart disease. Five of the individuals were from the Portland metropolitan area. Five were men and five were women, and eight had greater than a high school education. The patients had nine different attending physicians. Of the persons taking lethal medications, the number of days between obtaining the prescription and death ranged from the same day to 16 days, for an average of two days. All individuals died within seven hours of taking the lethal medications, and the average time was 40 minutes. Of those persons who obtained a prescription but died directly from their terminal illness, the average number of days between obtaining a prescription and death was 10.5 days.

We are releasing this preliminary summary to inform the public and those concerned about ethical, legal and medical aspects of the Act, Hedberg stated. She emphasized that the Health Services is mandated to protect the privacy of persons participating in the Death with Dignity Act. Release of more specific information at this time would jeopardize this guarantee of protection, she said.

The Health Services is in the process of conducting in-depth interviews with the physicians of persons obtaining lethal medications under the provisions of the Act. A report covering all of the 1998 Death with Dignity cases will be released in early 1999, and will include a summary of the in-depth interviews with physicians.

The Death with Dignity Act requires that the Oregon Health Services collect information regarding