# Dr. James Haslam Clarifies Distinction Between Withdrawing Treatment and Assisted Dying



Dr. James Haslam has articulated in a recent letter that withholding or withdrawing futile treatments should not be conflated with assisted dying. His commentary appeared in The Guardian on May 15, 2024, in response to Dr. Jagat Aulakh’s previous letter suggesting a form of assisted dying already occurs in hospitals. Haslam emphasized that stopping treatments that are ineffective or not beneficial is part of good medical practice, as guided by the General Medical Council (GMC).

The GMC's "Good Medical Practice" guidance states that doctors must prioritize patient care and uphold patient trust. Haslam argued that physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia conflict with these duties, as they involve intentionally ending a patient’s life. He highlighted that withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment is conducted when the burdens of such treatments outweigh the benefits, stressing that such actions are fundamentally different from assisted dying, which involves an active, intentional effort to cause death. Dr. Haslam, a consultant in intensive care medicine and anesthesia, concluded with a hope that physician-assisted suicide remains unlawful in the UK.