An open letter to our community regarding the End of Life Option Act.

To our valued patients, friends, colleagues, partners, and community members:

This morning — like every morning since the dawn of medicine — nurses, doctors, and those supporting them will pass an invisible baton at shift change to their colleagues who will continue delivering care to patients in need. As one aspect of this care, medical professionals will comfort and counsel patients confronting difficult prognoses, challenging treatments and questions about their futures. At Huntington Hospital, we think about these conversations every day, even more so in light of the passage of California Senate Bill 128, the End of Life Option Act.

Regardless of culture, faith or politics, we can all agree that death is a sensitive and complex topic with no easy answers. We have all held the hand of a friend or family member nearing the end of their life and learned that no training or experience can lessen the sorrow of losing a loved one. As medical professionals, we have seen significant progress in how we can make patients in their final days most comfortable. At Huntington Hospital we have been a pioneer in investing significantly in palliative, spiritual and other whole-person care to ensure that dignity and comfort are central to our culture. When terminally ill patients die at our hospital, we do everything in our power to ensure their passing includes compassion and dignity. That will not change with this law. What is different under this law is the option for patients to be able to end their lives with the assistance of a physician.

Earlier this year, our hospital began ongoing, thoughtful deliberations about whether and how to participate in this new law. In June, as the law came into effect, we announced that we would participate in the act while we completed our deliberations. Now, after careful evaluation of the law, its consequences, what is right for our community, and — most important—what is consistent with our vision to serve our community with kindness and dignity, our board of directors determined that **Huntington Hospital will continue to participate in the End of Life Option Act.** As has always been the case, physicians will individually decide whether they will participate or not.

As members of our community, it is important that you know that we heard and understood your feelings on the matter. In conversations with our physicians, palliative care experts, nurses, bioethicists, patients and community, the most critical factor in the end-of-life discussion is individual choice.

We fully respect those who disagree with the law and we expect it will be quite rare that patients choose to end their lives in our hospital. In Oregon, for example, which has had a similar statute in place since 1998, patients have overwhelmingly decided to exercise this option outside of a hospital setting. According to the most recent Oregon data, 990 of the 991 patients who terminated their lives chose to do so in their homes or non-hospital locations.

To better understand how the End of Life Option Act applies to you personally, or to someone you love, we encourage you to have a conversation with your physician. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our perspective, our process and, ultimately, our decision. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with our community.

Huntington Hospital

Compassionate community care.