

## Medical aid in dying in Fraser health Authority

On June 17, 2016, the federal government passed Bill C-14 which legalized the provision of physician assisted suicide and euthanasia which is called Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) in the bill. The legislation mandates certain guidelines: the patient is 18 years of age or older; is competent and capable of making decisions at the time of the procedure and the patient suffers from a grievous and irremediable medical condition, disease or disability that is causing enduring physical or psychological suffering that the patient views as intolerable and for which there are no treatment options that are acceptable to the patient. The patient's death must also be reasonably foreseeable.

Across the country, provincial governments and regulators have laid out guidelines as to how these procedures will be provided in each province.

Palliative care and hospice care have always been very clear that euthanasia and physician assisted suicide (or MAiD) have no place in our scope of practice. We adhere to the widely-held World Health Organization definition of palliative care which encompasses whole person care for patients and families and that treats all symptoms with excellence and compassion and neither hastens nor prolongs natural death.

On October 11, 2016, the Fraser Health Board will be considering a decision to mandate that all palliative care units and hospice facilities in FHA be required to provide MAiD (assisted suicide/ euthanasia) within their units or facilities. This would be a tragic mistake. Palliative care professionals have worked very hard for years to build trust with patients and families. We have continuously reassured them that euthanasia and assisted suicide have no place in palliative care. Providing these procedures (MAiD) will undermine this trust and will deter many patients and families from seeking the help they desperately need and that we are able to provide. We know from other jurisdictions that those requesting euthanasia or assisted suicide compose only 3-4% of the population. Palliative care units and hospices have traditionally been safe places for patients and families. Mandating the provision of euthanasia and assisted

suicide (MAiD) in these facilities will discriminate against the majority of patients who want a place that is safe during this very vulnerable time in their lives. By excluding MAiD from palliative care units and hospices, patients will not need to worry or be fearful about being subject to MAiD without consent. They will be protected from the distress of hearing discussions about the procedures and knowing that the procedures themselves that may be happening nearby. Patients and families in our units and hospices talk to one another constantly. There will be no way to keep any secrets about what is happening if these procedures are introduced and there will be fear as a result.

It is important that the Fraser Health Board hear from as many individuals and groups as possible as to why this is not a good idea. Until now, Fraser Health has provided a place for those who qualify for MAiD by having one dedicated facility to which patients have been transferred for the provision of MAiD. For the patients who chose this, it has functioned well. This seems like a very reasonable accommodation. Those who qualify for MAiD and who wish to have the procedure have a site that has developed some expertise in this area, while patients and families in all other facilities are protected from concerns about either wrongful death or the stress of hearing about these procedures.

If this issue concerns you we would encourage you to write to the board urgently including the following points as well as your own stories.

1. MAiD should not be provided on palliative care units or in hospices. MAiD is *not* palliative care and should be kept separate from palliative care to maintain this distinction.
2. Those who face life-threatening illness, or who are dying, are particularly vulnerable. To protect patients who are vulnerable, provision of MAiD should be kept separate from palliative care units and hospices.
3. The majority of patients (more than 97%) wish to live well until they die. Effective and timely access to palliative care is essential to prevent MAiD from becoming the default procedure because of lack of true alternatives.

4. If patients and families mistakenly believe that MAiD is part of palliative care and do not understand what a true palliative approach to care can provide, they cannot make an informed choice.

5. If this mandate is approved, Fraser Health residents will lose trust in the care in palliative care units or hospices because they provide MAiD. This may mean that patients and families must choose either to avoid palliative care units and hospice facilities altogether or to go to faith-based facilities which may be far from their homes and loved ones. Surely we can do better than this.

Please sign the petition linked to here:

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/citizens-for-patient-safety>

Please write to the board without delay. The board meeting is in a matter of days and our voices need to be heard. Thank you.

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