Insights into the complex relationship between palliative care and medical assistance in dying


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• St. Joseph’s Healthcare Foundation
• McMaster University
  – Division of Palliative Care
  – Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences
Background

• “Palliative care… intends to neither hasten nor postpone death” (WHO)

• Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians survey (Nov 2010)
  – 88% opposed to legalization of euthanasia
  – 90% unwilling to participate in euthanasia
Timeline

Nancy B
Quebec
1992

Attorney
General
Guidelines
British Columbia
1993

Robert
Latimer
Saskatchewan

Gloria Taylor
British Columbia
2012

SCC Carter
Ruling
February 2015
2015

Bill 52
Quebec
Dec 2015

Bill C-14
June 2016
2016

Sue Rodrigues
British Columbia

Gloria Taylor
British Columbia
2015

Bill 52
Quebec
Dec 2015

Attorney
General
Guidelines
British Columbia
1993

SCC Carter
Ruling
February 2015
2015

Bill C-14
June 2016
2016
Our Question

As the group of healthcare providers caring for the patients most likely to be affected by the SCC ruling:

• What do palliative care physicians think about the legalization of MAiD?

• How will they respond?
Study

- **Research team**: ethicists, pall care nurse, pall care MDs, psychologist, qualitative research methodologist
- **Design**: descriptive qualitative research based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews
- **Participants**: 44/49 palliative care specialists in Ontario LHIN 4 (Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand, Brant, Burlington) and/or associated with McMaster University
- **Timing**:
  - SCC Carter Ruling: February 2015
  - Bill 52 Quebec: Dec 2015
  - Parl Comm Report: Feb 2016
  - Bill C-14 tabled: April 2016
  - Bill C-14 Royal assent: June 2016
Interview

• At time, location and with participants’ interviewer of choice

• Interviews recorded, transcribed, de-identified and entered into qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo)

• Analyzed using conventional content analysis
  – All interviews reviewed by a subgroup of investigators to develop general codes
  – ~10 particularly rich interviews reviewed by all investigators to refine coding categories
  – Coding reports (from all interviews) on key categories reviewed by whole team to develop consensus on interpretation and themes
Interview Questions

• What does Palliative Care mean to you?
• Experience with and understanding of patient requests to hasten death?
• Reaction to the Supreme Court ruling?
• Anticipated impacts of the ruling?
• Role of Palliative Care in MAiD?
• What will you do?
Overview of Results

• Physicians’ responses to the legislation
• Their thoughts and concerns regarding MAiD
• Their perceived implications for individual medical practice
  – For the discipline of palliative care
  – For society as a whole
• The anticipated impact on their ability to care for patients at the end of life
• Their support needs
What will you do?

Overview of responses

• very few definitive ‘Y’ or ‘N’
• 3 thought that they would likely participate
• 4 were not sure yet
• 3 conscientious objectors
• the remainder were at various stages of ‘N’, some definitely not, others not willing to inject but would do other things, others still thinking ‘not now . . . . But . . . ’
Refer
Explore request
Assess
Support
Accompany
Not abandon
Respect choice
Help them
Inform
Palliate
Counsel
Discussion

• The interview provided an opportunity to dialogue which served as a catalyst for reflection by the interviewee
  – Evolution of thought, understanding
  – Exploration of meaning
  – Engagement
  – Discovery of self
  – Maintaining a sense of openness
Implications

• Research methods – false simplicity of surveys masks the complexity
  – Value and the richness of the qualitative inquiry

• Policy
  – One size ≠ all
  – How to build a system that is designed to accommodate an evolution of thought

• Non-physician involvement with MAiD – study other PC groups affected (NP’s)
Limitations

• Timing
• Single region
• Only physicians

Future Research

• Follow-up study
• Multi-site design
• Interview other team members, beginning with NPs
References

• CSPCP Euthanasia Survey Results, 2010


Thank you
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