

## Doctor-assisted dying places Canada at ?moral crossroads?

Canada is about to face a moral crossroads.

In June, Federal plans for implementing legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide will be finalized. A committee advising Parliament has already recommended broadening access from the original Supreme Court recommendation to those with a mental illness and even ?competent children.?

We need to think this through carefully, I believe.

International research by palliative care physicians shows that it is not extreme pain that causes requests for assisted suicide. Most extreme pain, they reveal, can be managed. In jurisdictions surveyed, the request emerges from psychological distress, fear of being a burden, fear of abandonment.

The answer is better palliative care that reinforces human dignity.

Canada needs to stress such care, and not rush into a frontier whose practices will put vulnerable Canadians at risk, especially those who are elderly or disabled (e.g. abuses in Belgium and the Netherlands).

Allowing euthanasia and assisted suicide will fundamentally change our country's approach to health care and our care for one another.

No one should be put in a situation where they need to justify a decision to live.

If the Federal government is going to allow either euthanasia or assisted suicide, it must ensure the strictest possible safeguards are in place. For example, children and teens must not have access to assisted death.

Persons experiencing psychological suffering, distress or mental illness must be protected.

As Canadians, we need to protect the sanctity of life. And we need to take every step possible to protect the conscience rights of medical professionals like doctors, nurses and pharmacists, and of institutions which have mission statements incompatible with the intentional taking of life.

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