

NEWS UPDATE DWD Canada

The judgment in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario case was released on Wednesday. The judges ruled unanimously in favour of the CPSO's policy on effective referrals. DWDC CEO Shanaaz Gokool comments:

"We believe the effective referral policy strikes a fair, sensible balance between a physician's right to conscience or moral objection and a patient's right to care. We are grateful that the judges' decision puts patients first."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/ontario-assisted-dying-court-challenge-1.4512815?cmp=rss>

You can read more on DWDC's blog:

http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/cpso_decision

Our press release can be found here:

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/dwdcanada/pages/3089/attachments/original/1517435392/DWDC-CPSO-Jan31-2018-final.pdf?1517435392>

More on the CPSO challenge with quotes from CEO Shanaaz Gokool:

"It's a stunning decision that really puts the rights of the most vulnerable residents of this province ahead of the rights of clinicians" who object on religious grounds. "It's a fair balance of rights."

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/religious-doctors-must-perform-referrals-for-medically-assisted-death-ontario-court/article37802558/>

We learned this week that DWDC will not be allowed to bring in an expert witness in the Quebec court challenge. This is disappointing news, but we remain hopeful that, as interveners, we'll still be able to bring the voices of Canadians to court.

(This article is in French, but can be translated using Google Translate.)

<http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1081675/aide-medicale-a-mourir-contestation-cour-superieure-gladu-truchon>

DWDC obtained 844 pages of correspondence through a Freedom of Information request that highlight the problems with forced transfers. The emails from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and the Catholic care provider Providence Health Care give a behind-the-scenes look at logistical problems, potential risks to patients and inevitable future conflicts when publicly funded medical facilities refuse to allow assisted dying on site. CEO Shanaaz Gokool comments:

"The purpose of those facilities is the delivery of health care to the communities that they serve. They're not there to support the political ideology of the policy-makers of those facilities," she said. "That's why they receive taxpayer funds."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/assisted-death-faith-based-facilities-1.4495859>

Dr. Jonathan Reggler, DWDC board member and chair of our Physicians Advisory Council, predicts that bans on MAID in faith-based institutions will go to court and speaks to the problem of forced transfers:

"I've seen patients arriving in their home in great pain, because we have to be careful with the amount of medication they give a person to enable a transfer."

Audio and article:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/jonathan-reggler-goo-bye-medical-assistance-dying-assisted-death-providence-health-fred-salmon-1.4483910>

DWDC's petition asking premiers and health ministers to address the problem of forced transfers was mentioned in the *St. Albert Gazette*. DWDC board member and Edmonton chapter co-chair, Brad Peter comments:

"In Alberta specifically, Covenant Health is probably the largest publicly-funded institution in the province and they have a policy that MAID cannot happen on its premises."

<https://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/petition-calls-government-access-medically-assisted-death-20180120>

Fewer than half of Nova Scotians who requested MAID in the last six months accessed an assisted death. DWDC Nova Scotia Chapter Chair, Sheila Sperry explains the importance of knowing the reasons why they were unable to move forward:

"We'd like to know how many of each, because if some of them lost capacity, why did they lose capacity? What was wrong with the timeframe that meant that they lost capacity?"

Video and article:

<https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/less-than-half-of-assisted-suicide-requests-accepted-in-n-s-report-1.3786178>

Former DWDC volunteer Noreen Campbell accessed MAID on January 12th 2017. Cliff, her husband of 48 years, spoke to Dr. Brian Goldman of CBC's *White Coat, Black Art*:

"I had very mixed feelings because I was happy for her, I could see how happy she was... I think we never want to see a loved one depart in that way. I knew that Noreen so strongly wanted this, I was determined to support her with that. But I didn't want it. I frequently told her I didn't want her to go, but I understood and I was willing to let her go if that's what she needed and that's what she wanted."

Article and audio:

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/a-year-after-maid-a-husband-talks-about-being-the-spouse-left-behind-1.4503481>

Dr. Brian Goldman also spoke with Tim Regan, a Toronto man who shared his story, including the obstacles he faced, the day before accessing MAID:

"As soon as I heard of Medical Assistance in Dying, I wanted MAID. I've had a lifetime of having my will turned towards a non-distended death."

<http://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/going-out-with-my-boots-on-tim-regan-used-his-last-days-to-lobby-for-a-clearer-path-to-assisted-death-1.4493373>

CBC reflects on the MAID stats in British Columbia. Dr. Stefanie Green, president and co-founder of the Canadian Association of MAiD Assessors and Providers, comments on the demographics in B.C. as well as the quick mobilization of the local health authority:

"Here on Vancouver Island, we have the demographics: a little more elderly, [people that are] a little more capable of making this decision."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/good-bye-medical-assistance-in-dying-stefanie-green-jonathan-reggler-fred-salmon-1.4483123>

Almost 3 years after the *Carter* decision was released, journalist Sandra Martin explains where we have been, where we still need to go and how we might get there.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/sandra-martin-physician-assisted-death-debate/article37742446/>

The federal assisted dying legislation requires that each MAID request must be in writing and that two witnesses must watch the patient sign and date the form, before signing themselves. This has created roadblocks for patients from coast to coast. Ellen Agger, DWDC's Victoria chapter co-chair, explains her experiences as an independent witness:

"Sometimes, the people we witness for are very, very frail. And their mortality is staring them in the face, but it is also staring you in the face."

Audio and article:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/rules-requiring-2-independent-witnesses-create-roadblocks-to-assisted-death-1.4481033>

In this piece, Jocelyn Downie speaks to some of the flaws with the current MAID legislation, including the narrow, four-part definition of "grievous and irremediable medical condition" and the 10 day wait period.

<http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/january-2018/hasty-change-to-assisted-dying-bill-a-serious-error/>

Ontario's South West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) is hiring a MAID coordinator. DWDC's Cory Ruf comments:

"There's absolutely a pressing need across Ontario for services that support individuals and families who are navigating requests for medical assistance in dying."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/medical-assisted-death-south-west-lhin-1.4504223>

Sunnybrook Hospital's Paul Taylor shares the story of a reader whose terminally ill father was turned down for MAID, and looks at what patients need to know about the assessment process.

<http://healthydebate.ca/personal-health-navigator/medical-assistance-in-dying-denied>

Sunnybrook has also launched a new project to give palliative care patients the chance to share their thoughts on living and dying.

<https://sunnybrook.ca/content/?page=thoughts-dying>

Faced with renal failure and blood cancer, Diane Stringfellow has been approved for an assisted death. She shares her views on her choice and the impact it has had on her family and others in her life. DWDC's Personal Support Program Manager, Nino Sekopet, comments on personal autonomy:

"We, as a society, we are really poor at recognizing where our boundaries should stop and where someone else's begins."

Article and audio:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/diane-stringfellow-medical-assistance-in-dying-physician-assisted-death-good-bye-royston-1.4475252>

Storm Miller's husband Dave recalls his wife's assisted death. Personal stories like Storm and Dave's help to bring more attention to the issue. DWDC Victoria co-chair Jeffrey Brooks explains:

"The more of these stories that are shared, it informs the public of what their rights are, what their choices are."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/dave-miller-storm-medical-assistance-in-dying-physician-assisted-death-good-good-bye-1.4475736>

Syd Valentine had an assisted death on January 28th. Two friends reflect on what it was like on her final day:

"It's not often we get to feel so alive and yet so conscious of our ultimate destiny," said O'Byrne. "We're all filled, floating with this experience," said Verchomin. "It's amazing."

<http://www.vancourier.com/living/health/a-good-day-to-die-b-c-woman-reflects-on-hosting-a-medically-assisted-death-1.23162000>

Priscilla Cole wanted Canadians to know about the challenges she faced in her efforts to have a peaceful death. While her wish for a medically assisted death was ultimately granted, her harrowing final weeks speak to the confusion that continues to shroud Canada's assisted dying law. Priscilla and her two sons, Donald and Howard, shared her final lesson with all of us on DWDC's blog:

"I have nothing to regret. My two boys have done wonderfully. My grandchildren are doing beautifully. I've done my job."

<http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/priscillacole>

Alain Michaud, 56, was diagnosed with ALS and chose to end his suffering with MAID: "It went so smoothly," his wife said. "I would be inclined to say that it is the ideal death."

(Article is in French, but can be translated using Google Translate)

<http://www.journaldequebec.com/2018/01/31/aide-medicale-a-mourir-choisir-de-mourir-en-douceur>

Jeanna Anne Bérubé accessed MAID in the fall of 2016. Her family shares their experience:

"In the 11 years that I've been a nurse, you can provide all the palliative care that you want, some medications just aren't enough. The person suffers, the patient suffers, the family sees that, they suffer. It's not anything I would want anybody to go through, to be honest with you. That's why I think it's easier for me to accept my mom's decision. I've seen a lot of people suffer, and I wouldn't want her to suffer."

<http://www.timminspress.com/2018/01/29/family-shares-story-of-mother-grandmothers-assisted-death>

An access to information request has revealed that the Timmins and District Hospital's assisted dying policy encourages the procedure to be done outside the hospital.

<http://www.timminspress.com/2018/01/23/tadh-assisted-dying-policy-encourages-procedure-outside-hospital>

This article discusses why you should start talking to your family and friends about your end of life wishes now.

<http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/kaasalainen-and-sussman-lets-discuss-end-of-life-issues-now>

Kelsey Goforth

National Volunteer and Events Coordinator

Dying With Dignity Canada