



NEWS RELEASE

North Simcoe Muskoka Hospice Palliative Care Network responds to Supreme Court ruling on physician-assisted death

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Orillia, ON, 06 February 2015 - This morning the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor of allowing physician-assisted death. The North Simcoe Muskoka Hospice Palliative Care Network (NSMHPCN) understands the concerns this raises for many community members and also understands the views of those in favor of this change. We believe that this decision is deeply personal; however we also encourage our citizens and our elected officials to view the question of physician-assisted death as outside the scope of hospice palliative care.

The World Health Organization defines palliative care as: “the active total care of patients whose prognosis is limited due to progressive, far-advanced disease. Its purpose is to relieve suffering and to help patients live as actively as possible, enhancing quality of life, neither hastening nor postponing death.”

We believe that access to excellent hospice palliative care should begin early in a patient’s diagnosis with a life-limiting illness and should continue through bereavement. We believe that the goal of high quality palliative care is to add quality to the end-of-life experience.

Sandra Dunham, Executive Director of the NSMHPCN reports: “The dialogue on physician-assisted death has provided a good opportunity to move discussions about death and dying into the public spotlight. As our population ages, we need to understand what our options are and we need to be sure we are able to offer people the best possible quality of life for as many days as possible. That is the goal of palliative care and that will not change when legislation is changed.”

Dr. Neda Rowhani-Seki, palliative care physician and Chair of the NSMHPCN Board of Directors concurs: “As physicians we encourage patients to plan for their end-of-life; with good planning and dialogue, we are able to allay most people’s fears and add great quality to the end-of-life experience.”

The Supreme Court decision gives parliament 12 months to change the laws. The NSMHPCN will join the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association and Hospice Palliative Care Ontario in encouraging legislators to differentiate between palliative care and physician-assisted death. The Network wants to

be sure that future legislation does not erode the ability of hospice palliative care services to meet the needs of Canadians living with a life-limiting illness.

The NSMHPCN is a member of Hospice Palliative Care Ontario (HPCO). This morning HPCO released the following statement: "Access to hospice palliative care is our main focus. While the legislation and other details regarding physician-assisted death are worked out over the next 12 months, HPCO will maintain our focus on promoting awareness of hospice palliative care and the need for better access to high quality hospice palliative care in any setting where someone may be expected to die. "

HPCO outlines the importance of continuing to improve access to hospice palliative care services:

- Most Canadians are not being referred to hospice palliative care in a timely fashion - the support for living well until dying can be greatly increased.
- The decision will have complex and confounding implications for end-of-life care in Canada and we cannot lose focus on the need to improve access to hospice palliative care.
- As a hospice palliative care organization we know that the health care system continues to underutilize and under-deliver palliative services, the first option for patients with terminal or life-threatening conditions.
- Improving access to hospice palliative care in any setting where someone may die must remain a public policy priority.
- Hospice palliative care providers and healthcare professionals must have the option to not participate in assisted suicide.
- The decision on assisted suicide is no excuse to stop or slow important progress required in improving access to palliative care across Canada.

For more information about hospice palliative care in North Simcoe Muskoka, please visit www.nsmhpcn.ca.

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