



A Pan-Canadian Palliative and End-of-life Care Strategy? Yes. As soon as possible!

In October of 2010, the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) joined its voice to those of the chorus - of individuals and organizations - appearing before the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care to advocate the development of a national palliative care system.

Three-and-a-half years have passed, and today, COLF is pleased to speak-out in support of NDP MP Charles Angus's Motion 456, which proposes the development of a "Pan-Canadian Palliative and End-of-life Care Strategy".

Today we find ourselves at a crossroad. Just as Mr. Angus proposes a system of palliative and end-of-life care, conservative MP Steven Fletcher – apparently inspired by recent developments in Québec – has introduced two private member's bills which, if adopted, would modify the Criminal Code of Canada in order exempt "physician-assisted death" from prosecution.

Despite Mr. Fletcher's claims that euthanasia and "physician-assisted death" can be effectively regulated in Canada, if the last years have taught us anything, it is that in countries where these lethal practices have been legalized, human life has been further devalued. One study has revealed that in the Flanders region of Belgium, where euthanasia has been legal since 2002, as many as 32% of "assisted deaths" are carried out without the patient's request. [\[i\]](#) In January 2014, Dr. Boudewijn Chabot, a former leader of the euthanasia lobby in the Netherlands, admitted that the law governing the practice in that country has been "derailed". Clearly, the more Canadians know about palliative care and the deadly realities of euthanasia and "physician-assisted death", the more certain it is that they will embrace the former and reject the latter.

Human life: a precious gift from God

We must decide what kind of country we want, recalling that a society's attitude towards its most vulnerable members is a sign of its level of civilization. Do we want a country where physical, psychological, social and spiritual pain and suffering are relieved through a system of national palliative care or where some citizens are licensed to kill others; to kill the most vulnerable, the sick, the suffering...the "burdensome"?

We need to seriously consider what death by license would look like in a Canada where medical costs are mounting and health care budgets shrinking. Let us reflect on the fact that killing, whatever euphemism we use to describe it, is killing, not caring. In our communities of faith —aware that the meaning of human life and suffering is to be found only in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ— let

us remind ourselves and each other that human life is a precious gift from God, a gift whose inestimable value is never dependent on any subjective notion of "quality". Surely we must choose a life-giving response to human suffering, not a death-dealing one!

In the clearest of terms, then, with Mr. Angus each of us needs to tell our elected representative in Ottawa to prioritize health care and to create a "Pan-Canadian Palliative and End-of-life Care Strategy".

Speak up for Life!

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) has been hosting a series of public town hall meetings across Canada to discuss issues surrounding end of life care. The CMA is also hosting an online discussion forum for members and a public live chat on the same topics (for more information see [CMA](#) and [Maclean's](#)). Now is the time for all of us to speak up for life!

[i] Tinne Smets et al. "Reporting of euthanasia in medical practice in Flanders, Belgium: cross sectional analysis of reported and unreported cases", British Medical Journal, June 2010.

COLF is co-sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus.

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