

## *Should Canadians have the Constitutional Right to end their own lives?*

That is the question that went before the Supreme Court of Canada on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October. The question is not a new one. Following is a timeline of events surrounding this issue over the past 20 years:

- 1992/93/94– Sue Rodriguez took her fight for the right to assisted suicide to the courts on two occasions. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled 5 to 4 to dismiss her appeal.
- 1994 – Senate Committee hearings were held across Canada to explore this issue. The Catholic Health Association of BC participated in the hearings and made several recommendations, including the need for ready access to quality palliative care and more education and training for health care professionals in the areas of pain control and symptom relief.
- 1995 – The Senate Committee’s final report included CHABC’s recommendations.
- 2005 to 2009 – several private members’ bills were introduced to legalize assisted suicide and were defeated.
- 2010 – Parliament voted 228 to 59 in favour of leaving our laws as they are.
- 2011 – the BC Civil Liberties Association launched a court challenge – referred to as the “Carter Case” – in an attempt to overturn our current laws relating to assisted suicide. Gloria Taylor was also a plaintiff in the case.
- 2012 – In June, Justice Lynn Smith ruled on this case in favour of BCCLA. Her decision was that the current law in Canada is “*unconstitutional*”. She gave the Federal Government one year to rewrite the laws to allow assisted suicide. She also gave Gloria Taylor a constitutional exemption for that year. In addition, she awarded \$1M to the BC Civil Liberties Association to help defray their court costs.

The Federal Government immediately appealed these decisions. A second court upheld the decision to give Gloria Taylor an exemption and to award the money to BCCLA. The question of the constitutionality of our current laws went to the BC Court of Appeal in the Fall of 2012.

- March 2013 – the BC Court of Appeal heard the appeal. In October 2013, the three Appeal Court judges (in a two to one decision) overturned Justice Smith’s ruling.
- The BC Civil Liberties Association appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The case is currently before this Court. Arguments were expected to begin on October 15<sup>th</sup>.
- The *Catholic Health Alliance of Canada* and the *Euthanasia Prevention Coalition of BC and Canada* both have intervenor status with the Supreme Court of Canada in this case.

The faithful are asked to pray that our Supreme Court judges are guided to make the right decision in this case. Changing our laws has the potential to cause great harm to the vulnerable – especially to the frail elderly and the disabled. The *Catholic Health Association of BC* continues to advocate for quality palliative care for those who need it. We also work to educate those who may not fully understand the difference between assisted suicide and making decisions at the end of life to withhold or withdraw treatment.

