



CANADIAN SOCIETY OF RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DES THÉRAPEUTES RESPIRATOIRES

CSRT Position Statement Support for Dying with Dignity

The Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (CSRT) supports the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling that will ensure that individuals have the opportunity to receive medical aid in dying.

Background

On February 6, 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled that the assisted dying ban currently in place across Canada violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In their decision, the high court specifically addressed the current ban on physician assisted dying and judged it contrary to Section 7 of the Charter, which guarantees individuals the right to life, liberty and security of the person. The ban on assisted dying will continue to be in place for the next 12 months hereby allowing time for policy makers, law enforcement agencies and the health care officials to prepare for assisting individuals who meet the criteria to receive medical aid in dying.

Eligibility criteria were also established by the Supreme Court to guide policy makers, law enforcements and health care officials. To be eligible to receive medical aid in dying, a person must be an adult who is of competent mind, must clearly consent to life-ending treatment, must have a grave and irremediable medical condition (including an illness, disease or disability) that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual. Therefore, individuals may not be terminally ill to be eligible for medical aid in dying. There is a provision to respect the decisions of physicians and other health care providers who do not wish to provide medical aid in dying.

The legal framework for assisted dying will fall significantly to the provinces. While the federal government and the provinces are expected to work together to craft assisted dying legislation, and because the provinces have the responsibility for the delivery of health care services in the constitution, each province may enact its own framework. There is no provision to force enactment of the law.

Rationale

Registered respiratory therapists (RRTs) are front line health professionals who work within the health care teams to provide end-of-life medical care to people with serious life-limiting conditions and help them live well until death. In addition, RRTs care for people with serious chronic and progressive illnesses that impact their respiratory health such as heart disease, cancer and chronic respiratory disorders.

The CSRT supports the recent ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada on dying with dignity because RRTs have long been strong advocates for the patient and strongly believe that a person's values, preferences and treatment goals should guide their respiratory care throughout their illness, from diagnosis to death. Advances in technology and treatment options have enhanced and extended life. RRTs are instrumental in educating individuals about living with acute and chronic life-threatening illnesses and providing respiratory care services that can lead to a "good death".

The Supreme Court of Canada's recent ruling enables RRTs to continue to use their knowledge, skills and clinical judgement to accompany individuals and their families who face life-threatening or non-malignant conditions that have reached the terminal phase of their life. RRTs will continue to focus on patients with advanced illness or with significant symptoms by emphasizing medically appropriate goal setting, honest and open communication with patients, families and members of the health team and meticulous symptom assessment and control.

The CSRT is committed to work with governments, patient groups, health care organizations and other stakeholders for the implementation of a legislative framework for quality end-of-life care.

About the CSRT

The CSRT is the national professional association representing approximately 3,600 respiratory therapists across Canada. The CSRT is also the credentialing agency for RTs who practice in non-regulated jurisdictions, administers the accreditation process for respiratory therapy education program and promotes the RT profession at the national and international level.

This Position Statement was approved by the Board of Directors of the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists on February 12, 2015.