



POSITION STATEMENT
FOLLOWING SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT RE: CARTER
February 12, 2015

The Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP) welcomes the ongoing attention to suffering at the end of life in Canada. Equitable access to quality palliative care has the ability to reduce suffering for the majority of Canadians and CSPCP continues to advocate for this. We seek to improve the quality of life of patients and families living with life-limiting conditions from time of diagnosis until death. We are sensitive to the suffering of all, including those who request help in hastening the time of their death and those who do not. CSPCP supports all physicians in providing quality end-of-life care and palliative care through education and advocacy.

The Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) has recently created the possibility of "physician assisted death". The majority of our members believe that this should not be provided by palliative care physicians. The SCC decision stated "While there are risks, to be sure, a carefully designed and managed system is capable of adequately addressing them". We also recognize those risks to Canadians, particularly to patients and those working in palliative care services, who may inadvertently be negatively impacted by the SCC decision and we are dedicated to reducing this risk of harm. This includes concern for physicians who may choose not to participate in "physician assisted death". In that light, while not endorsing the act of "physician assisted death", we will work actively using our experience of serving dying patients and their families, in partnership with the Canadian Medical Association, physicians' colleges, Parliament, and provincial legislatures and others, to develop those system guidelines that will seek to minimize potential harm for the majority and respect the rights of the minority who seek this mode of death.

"You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die." Dame Cicely Saunders (1918-2005) Founder of the Hospice Palliative Care movement.