

House and Senate Agree: Palliative Care Matters!

(Dec 12, 2017) In a time when House and Senate don't always agree – it is refreshing that both groups voted “yes” to federal legislation to develop a framework for providing proper palliative services to all Canadians who require them.

Dr. David Henderson, President of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians (CSPCP), said: “Passage of Bill C-277, *An Act providing for the Development of a Framework on Palliative Care in Canada*, signals recognition of the urgent need to ensure that all Canadians have access to high quality palliative care.”

The bill received Royal Assent today after being passed by the House of Commons this spring and by the Senate of Canada last week. The legislation was the result of a private members' bill brought forward by Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Sarnia-Lambton Marilyn Gladu. It is highly unusual for private members' bills to become law, especially when proposed by an Opposition MP.

“This is how Parliament ought to be, addressing needs of Canadians and doing it in a way whereby we work together and come up with a better solution,” said Ms. Gladu during third reading of the bill this spring.

“Canadians need palliative care,” she said. “It is hard to know how much palliative care is really available because the data is not that good. At least 70% of Canadians have no access to palliative care. We do not have enough palliative care physicians. Certainly from a cost perspective, palliative care done in different ways, by home care, by paramedics, can reduce the cost from \$1,100 a day in a hospital down to \$200 for hospice or \$100 a day or less a day by paramedics. There is an opportunity to get more with our health dollars.”

With the legislation now in place, Dr. Henderson said the CSPCP will be recommending the development of a small team to bring key national organizations together to make recommendations on implementation. “We will need to partner with the provinces to make real national changes that can improve palliative care for all Canadians,” he said. “The provinces and territories are responsible for health care delivery and I believe this issue can show our country how our provincial, territorial and federal governments can come together for the sake of all Canadians to put in place a robust palliative care system. We are talking about a health issue we all face, dying and death. Every Canadian has a right to a good death.”

Under the terms of the legislation, the federal government now has six months to begin the process of working with provincial and territorial governments and with palliative care providers to develop the framework to give Canadians access to palliative care, through hospitals, home care, long-term care facilities and residential hospices. The federal Minister of Health must prepare a report setting out the framework on palliative care and present it to Parliament within one year.

Under the terms of the legislation, the framework must:

- define palliative care;
- identify the palliative care training and education needs of palliative health care providers;
- identify measures to support palliative caregivers;
- collect research and data on palliative care;
- identify measures to facilitate a consistent access to palliative care across Canada; and
- evaluate the advisability of amending the *Canada Health Act* to include palliative care services.

While recognizing the importance of having the legislation in place, Dr. Henderson pointed out work has already been completed on the type of framework envisaged by the legislation.

The national framework, entitled *The Way Forward*, was developed through an extensive multi-year, federally-funded project conducted by the Quality End of Life Care Coalition of Canada (QELCCC).

“The principles in the framework have not changed and they have been repeatedly endorsed by many organizations including our own,” Dr. Henderson said. “What we need now is a nimble, effective structure to implement what experts have already agreed to nationally.”

The CSPCP provided concrete steps for implementing *The Way Forward* in a November 2016 report: *How to Improve Palliative Care in Canada: Call to Action for Federal, Provincial, Territorial, Regional, and Local Decision Makers*. The “Palliative Care Matters” national consensus report from December 2016 outlined similar recommendations.

The CSPCP had supported Gladu’s private member’s bill since its introduction through presentations before committees of both the House of Commons and Senate.

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About the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians

The Vision of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians is to promote access to palliative care for all Canadians, through advocacy, partnerships, research, and physician education. Our membership consists of approximately 500 palliative care physicians and physicians with a special interest in palliative care -- including regional and local program leaders, educators, residency directors, clinicians, and palliative care residents.

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