



Disability, Dignity and Medical Aid in Dying

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The following discussion questions are provided as an additional educational tool to accompany this fireside chat video. Please feel free to select the questions that are most relevant to your committee or group, revise and adapt them as needed etc. As always, we welcome feedback on this or any other NSHEN resource.

1. How does your understanding of dignity align with or differ from Frazee's?
2. *"Each day of our lives, disabled people like me do battle in a world that prizes all that we are not. Our struggles to claim some sense of place in this world are not won by sheer force of will and character. Rather, those of us who succeed and thrive do so in small enclaves of honest regard and fearless embrace. In such enclaves, the slings that lift us, the tubes that feed us, the instruments that fill our lungs with air and empty our bladders of urine are understood as tools for living, rather than as markers of spoiled life."* (C. Frazee, Toronto Star, 2014).

Frazee argues that our society values only lives that are "lived full strength." Do our societal values, narratives and understanding of sickness, health, disability, death and dying need to change? If so, how?

3. What role, if any, does a lack of access to and/or understanding of palliative and end-of-life care for many Canadians play in this debate?
4. *"By sanctioning medical assistance to end a life for these reasons, when physical dependence and limitation are accepted uncritically as reasons to die, disability prejudice is elevated to the level of public policy. A great many people with disabilities, myself included, require supports of the most intimate kind in order to move through and participate in the world... That we do so, with our dignity intact and our quality of life undiminished, is inconceivable to those who believe that life must be lived full-strength in order to be rich and satisfying. This gap of perception is no small matter, for it is the soil upon which ableism - a belief in the superiority of nondisabled experience - takes root."* (C. Frazee, The Chronicle Herald, 2014).

Discuss Frazee's statement that legalizing medical aid in dying publicly sanctions ableism and disability prejudice.

5. Do you agree with Frazee that the very private act of assisted death has important societal implications?
6. What is your position on the legalization of medical aid in dying? Has it changed at all since reflecting on this video?

Resources

Canadian Medical Association – End-of-Life Care Resources

<https://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/eol-legislation-bill-52.aspx>

Canadian Medical Association (2012). End-of-Life Care: A National Dialogue

<https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/end-of-life-care-report-e.pdf>

Canadian Medical Association Journal – End of Life Care Resources

<http://www.cmaj.ca/site/misc/end-of-life-care.xhtml>

Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians – Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide Resources

<http://www.cspcp.ca/category/euthanasia-pas/>

Dying With Dignity Canada

<http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/>

The Fifth Estate (2012) – The Life and Death of Gloria Taylor

<http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/episodes/2012-2013/the-life-and-death-of-gloria-taylor>

Library of Parliament (2013). Background Paper: Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide in Canada

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2010-68-e.pdf>

Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association

<http://www.nshpca.ca/>

NSHEN Video - Jocelyn Downie: The Right to Die

<http://nshen.ca/ethics-resources/videos/2014/10/20/national-health-ethics-week-the-right-to-die;-jocelyn-downie/>

Publications on End of Life Issues by Catherine Frazee - The Fragile and the Wild

<http://www.fragileandwild.com/supplementals/end-of-life/>