

The Government is to be congratulated for its intent to give Canadians the lawful right to a dignified death. Canada will become one of the few jurisdictions in the world that allows its citizens to escape the fear, despair, and outright cruelty of a prolonged death. But Bill C-14 will not accomplish this. It is too restrictive, and falls short of what Canadians deserve. Its major shortcomings are:

- It requires a clearly foreseeable time of death;
- It does not allow pre-approval of Assisted Dying in a Living Will;
- It is troubling that the bill suggests that the patient must be competent at the time of request and the time of the assisted death;
- Lawmakers should use the language of Carter in the legislation as this will ensure that the law is compliant with both Carter and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Just over a year ago, my dad (who was suffering severe aphasia due to a stroke) developed a stomach flu which left him bedridden for several weeks. Diabetic sores developed on his arms and legs which the doctor said would have to be amputated. Faced with this reality, he decided to starve and dehydrate himself to death. This took 16 days and nights, during which time he was fully conscious, afraid, and in pain. Watching that process was like watching 16 days of torture.

Under Bill C-14, my dad would not have been eligible for Assisted Dying because of the cognitive impairment he had suffered. The very thing that the Supreme Court said was unconstitutional—that is, forcing Canadians to lose all dignity as they die horrible, protracted, agonizing deaths—has been left in place in Bill C-14. This is not just a bitter disappointment to me – it is a cruel, heartless proposal that would continue to condemn disease victims to yet more fear and pain.

In 2013, my mom also began to suffer from vascular dementia as the result of a series of strokes. Had the option been available, she would have wanted to make an Advanced Directive because her neurologist had told her that more strokes and progressive dementia was inevitable. At Christmas 2015, a second major stroke occurred, and she was rendered unresponsive.

My brothers and I complied with her Living Will that she be left to starve and dehydrate. Watching her become corpse-like over six days, and then linger for another ten was agonizing to watch. She showed clear signs of distress throughout; she cried out, she grimaced, and would gruesomely tense all the muscles in her body.

Twenty years ago, my grandmother, too, starved and dehydrated herself to death after nine months of colon cancer, from which she was already in excruciating pain. She was fully conscious, scared and in pain, but it took 12 terrible days of torture for her to pass.

For mom, dad, and grandma, the existing law demanded that they endure complete loss of dignity, pain, fear, and utter misery involved in a 'natural' death. A different but also terrible suffering was inflicted on me and my brothers. It was my hope that Bill C-14 would put an end to this legal cruelty.

The 'logic' of some that "suffering is good because it brings you closer to God" is bizarre and shocking. Such a view might be acceptable to some believers, but it should certainly not be a consideration in creating Canadian laws – it is nothing but an attempt to impose upon all the religious belief of a minority. It is the opinion of the 85 percent of Canadians who approve of Assisted Dying that should be respected.

I also find it troubling that the legislation stipulates that death must be 'in the reasonably foreseeable future'. The Supreme Court deemed it "cruel" to condemn *anyone* to "a life of severe and intolerable suffering". But Bill C-14 would do precisely that. Where is the compassion that Supreme Court found lacking in the existing law?

It appears likely that the current Bill, if enacted, will in its turn be found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Another go-round will be required before the large majority of Canadians get what they deserved to have all along: the option of a dignified, compassionate, assisted death.

We cannot call ourselves a civilized nation if we do not offer Advance Directives and Assisted Dying to people with all illnesses; it is the only way to treat those we love with compassion and dignity.

Yours respectfully

Laura Phelps