



Spinal Cord Injury Canada's Written Response Regarding Changes to Bill C-7

*Submitted by Bill Adair, Executive Director
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Spinal Cord Injury Canada calls for amendments to Bill C-7 to ensure informed consent is protected for people living with a spinal cord injury or other disabilities. There is not enough time in the proposed legislation to ensure that a person with a new injury can fully exercise their right to informed consent. These circumstances may lead to a person ending their life in a moment of despair without allowing proper consideration of options for improving their quality of life.

Facts

Recent research shows that 50% of people who sustain a spinal cord injury have suicidal ideation during the first two years post-injury. Results from this same research show that 100% of the people with a spinal cord injury participating in this study report they were not in a position to decide on ending their life, with informed consent, during the first two years following the onset of the spinal cord injury. Spinal Cord Injury Canada asks the committee to seek the expert advice of Dr. Natalja Tchajkova, who is a lead researcher on this issue and who has lived experience supporting people immediately after sustaining a spinal cord injury.

Research on Assisted Suicide and People with a Spinal Cord Injury

Title: *Inside the Lived Perspective of People Who Have Had a Spinal Cord Injury*: A qualitative study reviewing life and the desire to end life after spinal cord injury

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ABSTRACT

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Assisting persons with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities
to achieve independence, self-reliance and full community participation
Charitable Registration # 118835032RR0001

The goal of this paper was to provide information that will assist physicians as they counsel individuals with spinal cord injuries (SCI) about medical-assistance-in-dying (MAiD). Twenty-three participants with varying spinal cord neurological levels of injury and classification were included. The time since SCI ranged from less than six months to more than 50 years. Five individuals participated in a focus group to help refine the questions to be asked. All participants were then individually interviewed by the first author. Participants' responses were transcribed and coded into classification themes by two reviewers.

Results - Half of the participants reported having suicidal ideation within the first two years of experiencing an SCI. No participants thought they would have been able to make an informed decision about MAiD during this time. Importantly, most participants reported that they were able to adapt and restructure their lives within two years of their SCI; this led to a reframing of their attitudes about their post-SCI life. This reframing was facilitated by peer mentorship and rehabilitation. Less than half of the participants felt that MAiD should be an option for individuals with chronic SCI.

Conclusion - These data indicate that decisions about MAiD are best left until two years after an SCI has occurred. This delay will allow individuals with an SCI to gain a better understanding of life with an SCI. As a result, these individuals will be able to make better-informed decisions about MAiD.

Spinal Cord Injury Canada includes a Federation of organizations across Canada that provide support for people living with a spinal cord injury to live the life they choose with self-reliance, independence and full community participation. There are approximately 86,000 People Living in Canada with a spinal cord injury. After assisting individuals on the journey to rebuild their life, we provide lifelong support so people continue to adjust, adapt and thrive living independently in the community. <https://sci-can.ca/>