

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
Re: Bill C7

Submitted by: Dr. Stephanie Kafie, MD, CCFP (COE),
Care of the Elderly Family Physician

Date of Submission: November 14, 2020

Dear Committee Members,

"What are your thoughts on killing the elderly?" She asked me frankly. "What an introduction," I thought. I never had someone open our first meeting with that kind of question. I paused for a moment and responded, "I don't kill my patients. You can feel confident that I will provide the best possible care to your aunt, and I am trained to provide palliative care at the end of life." She was relieved. Her aunt was relieved. Trust was established. Our caregiving relationship began.

I am a family physician with a focused practice designation in Care of the Elderly. I work in a hospital and retirement homes providing care to some of the most frail and vulnerable members of our society. I see people who rely on an army to live. I see people suffering from mental illnesses, physical ailments, and chronic disease. Despite all the morbidity I see on a daily basis, I also see these older adults finding joy in small gains, appreciating the life they are living, and redefining hope in their lives. These older adults are one group who is most at risk of prematurely losing their lives as a result of unnecessary changes to bill C7.

The patients I meet daily and the families I interact with are losing trust in our healthcare system and in healthcare providers. The first question I am asked when meeting a new family of a patient should be "What's your name?" NOT "Will you kill our mother?" When the patient-provider relationship erodes, it is impossible to provide quality care.

Working with older adults has exposed me to many instances where requests for medical assistance in dying (MAiD) actually reflected a need for palliative care. One patient I encountered did not see the reason she should keep living as her relationship with her children was eroding and she was experiencing unbearable pain. Providing her with quality palliative care after our first meeting greatly improved her pain levels. Several counselling sessions about her family life allowed her to gain the confidence to rebuild a relationship with her son. She needed support, a listening ear, and good medical management to live a full life to the end instead of a physician who offered to end it all before exploring further. She died peacefully and naturally three months later after enjoying an ice cream every day and a newly rebuilt relationship with her son.

Over 750 Canadian physicians have signed a petition at www.maid2mad.com raising concerns about Bill C-7 as it is currently written, and requesting safeguards be instituted to prevent the most vulnerable from losing their lives at the hands of medical professionals. To quote the petition, *"Our profession has been coerced into facilitating suicide rather than preventing it, for ever-increasing numbers of citizens. We watch in utter dismay and horror at how the nature of our medical profession has been so quickly destroyed by the creation of misguided laws. We, the undersigned, declare that the passage of Bill C-7, if left unchecked, will contribute to the destruction of much more than our medical profession, but fundamentally, of a Canadian society that genuinely values and cares for its most vulnerable members. Canadians deserve better."*

It is imperative Bill C-7 be amended to protect vulnerable populations including older adults. Specifically, **safeguards such as two independent witnesses, a 10-day reflection period to help prevent someone's worst day from becoming their last day, and contemporaneous consent are required.**

MAiD has been deemed an essential service in Canada. Currently, palliative care is not an essential service. **Palliative Care needs to be deemed an essential service under the Canada Health Act.** This would ensure all Canadians have access to compassionate end of life care that allows them to both live and die with dignity. Do not allow unrestricted killing of patients without adequate safeguards under Bill C-7. The patient-doctor relationship is eroding daily before my eyes as a result of the proposed legislation.

I will keep meeting new patients and families. I will reassure them that their lives are worth living. I will hold their hands until they take their last breath, and I will support families through every challenge. I will provide quality medical care that involves compassion, empathy, and respect for our elders. I call on you, legislators, to protect the vulnerable including our parents and grandparents.

Respectfully yours,

Stephanie Kafie

Dr. Stephanie Kafie, MD, CCFP (COE)
Assistant Clinical Professor (Adjunct), Department of Family Medicine,
McMaster University
Family Physician, Care of the Elderly

Bibliography

www.maid2mad.com