



DATE: March 20, 2016
TO: Staff, Physicians and Volunteers
FROM: President and CEO Patrick Dumelie
RE: Your voice matters – physician assisted death

Following its landmark ruling in early 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada has asked Parliament and the provincial governments to develop legislative frameworks for physician assisted death by June 2016 for competent adults who clearly consent to the termination of life and who have a “grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes intolerable and enduring suffering.”

The Supreme Court ruling has brought unprecedented and momentous change for health care. For over a year, we have been working closely with our physicians, local health partners and stakeholders, our Catholic sponsor and the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada to provide a thoughtful response that reflects our mission and values.

The Alberta Government is now seeking input from Albertans on implementation. As a community of caregivers and health care professionals, we all have an important role to play in lending our voice to this process. I hope the following information is helpful to you in considering this important issue.

Responding to the legislation

The provincial government has asked Covenant Health to provide a formal response to the legislation. Our response focuses the following points:

- As Canada’s largest Catholic healthcare organization, Covenant Health will not participate in physician assisted death because it is not in keeping with our values or ethical guidelines. The dignity of the person and the belief that all life is sacred sits at the heart of everything we do; it shapes our decisions at the bedside every day.
- We will continue to respect the law and provide assistance to people at end of life. We will respond with compassion and respect to anyone who requests physician assisted death without discrimination or coercion, seeking to understand their request and exploring with them their options—including timely transfer of care for further assessment.
- We believe the province must consider the rights of caregivers and health care organizations whose conscience or religious conviction prevents them from being involved in physician assisted death. We feel it is critical this legislation specifically protects and respects the freedoms of all Albertans.
- As we have so often done throughout our 150-year history, we are confident we can find solutions that allow us to continue to walk with our patients, respect their choices and coordinate care across providers.

Supporting palliative care

We are proud to be leaders in palliative care. Palliative care offers comfort, relief and quality of life to patients who are often at the end stages of an illness. It is compassionate care that neither prolongs dying nor hastens death. Palliative care does not include physician assisted death. Covenant Health is a pioneer in palliative care in Canada and one of the largest palliative care providers in Alberta. We are one of many health care providers from across the country calling for more access to palliative care and support for those at the end of life.

**Responding to the Government survey by March 31, 2016**

The provincial government has asked Albertans to share their thoughts on physician assisted death. They have invited individuals and organizations to complete an online survey. As people who work on the front lines of health care who wrestle with questions of life and death every day, you have an important perspective to share. We have provided a corporate response to the survey. We encourage you to do the same. Please lend your voice at this critically important time.

For more information

We have put together an online toolkit to help guide you through the process. The toolkit will provide you with more in-depth information about the survey and our response. Located on CovenantHealth.ca, you will find a number of resources including:

- A link to the government survey on physician assisted death and a copy of our response
- Covenant Health's written response to the health minister (by March 31, 2016)
- Information on the Catholic health response to physician assisted death
- Resources related to palliative care and end of life

Thank you for your continued commitment to working with our patients and residents as participants in their own care and respond to their needs and requests with compassion and respect. Thank you for living our mission each day.