



**DATE:** May 25, 2016  
**TO:** All Staff, Physicians and Volunteer  
**FROM:** Patrick Dumelie, President and CEO  
**RE: Policy – Responding to Requests for Medical Assistance in Dying**

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Today, Covenant Health releases its new policy, *Responding to Requests for Medical Assistance in Dying*. This concludes a two-year policy development process that involved extensive stakeholder engagement, locally and nationally, and informed by our clinical experience and the Catholic moral tradition and teaching. The policy is consistent with the *Health Ethics Guide*, our foundational ethics resource, and public statements our organization has made over the years, beginning with our appearance before the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care in 2010.

We recognize the profoundly emotionally laden nature of the issue of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide. The Supreme Court of Canada *Carter* decision has introduced a momentous shift across the national landscape. However, our longstanding tradition regarding the respect for the dignity of all human life, from conception to natural death, remains unchanged. The new legal realities have not changed our ethical traditions around withdrawing or withholding disproportionately burdensome or medically inappropriate medical care. And finally, while there are still many uncertainties regarding the legislative frameworks even as the extended June 6<sup>th</sup> deadline nears, nothing has changed as far as our commitment to palliative and end-of-life care of which we are most proud.

Indeed, throughout our policy development process, we have emphasized that arguably the most important word in our policy is the first word in the title – *Responding*. We have in the past, and will continue to respond to persons in our care who verbalize a desire to end their lives. This response seeks to understand the nature of the person's request and to ensure that their pain and symptom management needs are addressed, including their emotional, spiritual and psychosocial needs. We will respond, as we have always done, ensuring that the person in care is not abandoned and provider conscience rights and institutional identity are upheld. We have demonstrated our capacity as an organization to navigate many complex ethical issues in times past, as attested by the comprehensive suite of policies we have in place that reflects a consistent ethic of life. I have great confidence we will continue to faithfully witness our mission and values in response to every human being we serve in our organization.

While an understandable amount of energy has been required to address this issue, we have never lost sight of our strategic priorities, and the populations of emphasis to which we stand committed. We believe that our service to seniors, those living with addiction and mental illness, and persons at the end-of-life is a moral imperative, and that our voice in advocating for their needs must be strengthened.

I wish to thank all those who have lent their own voices in developing our policy and contributing to the collaborative clinical and administrative leadership that continually responds to the needs of persons in our care, with dignity, compassion and excellence.



*Memo Re: Policy – Responding to Requests for Medical Assistance in Dying  
May 25, 2016*

The policy is attached. Further links to Questions and Answers and other resources can be found on our Ethics Centre and Medical Staff Portal available through CompassionNet, as well as our external website at <http://www.covenanthealth.ca/media/122358/responding-to-requests-for-medical-assistance-in-dying-policy-vii-b-440-may-24-2016.pdf>

Questions and comments may be addressed to:

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