



Catholic Health Alliance of Canada  
Alliance catholique canadienne de la santé

Sarah O'Donnell, Opinion Editor  
Edmonton Journal  
P.O. Box 2421  
Edmonton, AB  
T5J 2S6  
[sodonnell@postmedia.com](mailto:sodonnell@postmedia.com)

**RE:** *Catholic hospitals put religious principles ahead of patient rights, Paula Simons, Sept. 28*

As Canada implements legislation related to medical assistance in dying, members of the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada have worked together to respond to requests with integrity—ensuring that we abide by the law and continue our 400-year mission of service in keeping with our ethics and values.

Catholic health care is a vital part of the Canadian health system. Each year, more than 68,000 team members employed by 124 Catholic providers across the country serve millions of Canadians from all backgrounds and faiths with respect, honouring the beliefs and diverse cultural needs and spiritual needs of those we serve.

All Canadians have conscience and religious freedom respected under the Charter. Catholic health care has a long-standing moral tradition that neither prolongs life nor hastens death. Catholic health care's conscientious objection to medical assistance in dying is a moral commitment to uphold the inherent value of each person while observing the law. It does not constitute a refusal to care for patients or undermine the values and rights of those in our care.

In fact, the *Health Ethics Guide*, the foundational ethics resource for Catholic health care organizations in Canada, specifically stipulates that the exercise of conscientious objection must not put the person in care at risk of harm or abandonment.

Our commitment to quality care seeks to foster a culture of deep engagement, where those involved in the healing journey are committed to the people we serve. As health care providers, we participate with those we serve without discrimination or coercion, with compassion and respect. This culture creates awareness, both of self and others, and opportunities to build profound relationships and understanding.

As Catholic health providers, we respond with respect to those who are exploring their options regarding medical assistance in dying. The law requires that a person clearly consent to medical assistance in dying, which includes exploratory discussions with patients and residents in order to

seek to understand their needs and to assist them in understanding all their options. This may result in safe and timely transfer of care.

Catholic health care providers in Canada are resourceful and effective partners within the health system, responding to the communities we serve with compassion, ethical integrity and the highest quality care and services.

Across Canada, Catholic health care providers operate under local agreements that respect their ability to abide by their faith and ethical traditions. We believe Canada is enriched by this pluralistic approach. Catholic providers have demonstrated the ability to respond with respect to the person in our care while also respecting the values of health professionals and those of our organizations today.

Canada's health care system effectively includes and accommodates many providers who do not provide all services—for a variety of reasons, including quality of care, efficiency, and on moral grounds. Not every service is available at every public facility in Canada. Safe and timely transfers of care happen between facilities every day in Canada.

We recognize medical assistance in dying is a deeply personal, emotionally charged and complex issue. We respectfully acknowledge there are things we can learn from every request for this procedure we receive across the country, most especially the need for more integrated palliative and hospice care resources. We remain committed to measured and thoughtful discussion of this vitally important issue—both in public discourse and at the bedside.

Regards

Michael Shea,  
President and CEO  
Catholic Health Alliance of Canada