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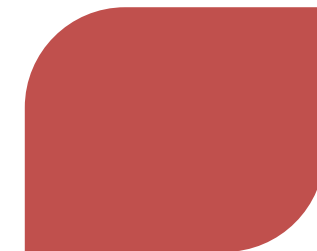
Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Community of Practice

More than witnessing a choice: Family members and MAiD

May 28th, 2026

Presented by: Dr. Tracy Powell

Facilitator: Sheila Killoran, MT, Education Lead Palliative Institute





Reminders

- This session is being recorded.
- Please do not disclose any personal health information during the session.
- Your microphones are muted. When we invite participation, please unmute yourself if you would like to speak at that time.
- If you experience technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat.

More than Witnessing a Choice: Family Members and MAiD

ALBERTA HOSPICE
PALLIATIVE CARE
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



PRESENTER DISCLOSURE

I AM NOT A MEMBER OF A
MAID TEAM.

I AM CHAIR AND BOARD
DIRECTOR, BRIDGE C- 14

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY, WHERE I RECEIVED AN INTERNAL RESEARCH GRANT FROM THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND AN INNOVATION GRANT FROM THE FACULTY OF HEALTH, COMMUNITY, AND EDUCATION TO SUPPORT SOME OF THE RESEARCH I WILL HIGHLIGHT IN THIS PRESENTATION.

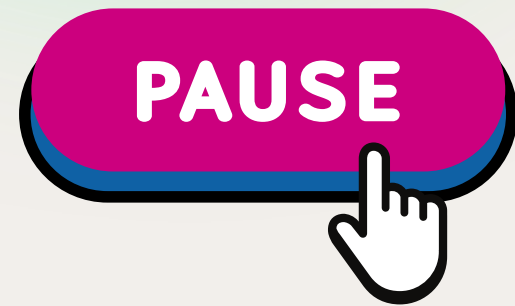
CANADIAN MAID ASSESSORS AND PROVIDERS (CAMAP) FOR A 2024 RESEARCH GRANT FOR THE RESEARCH I WILL HIGHLIGHT IN THIS PRESENTATION.

This session invites both clinical and reflective engagement

Reflection is offered as an invitation, not an expectation.

You may consider having:

A notebook, paper or use an app on your phone for thoughts and reflection.



What experiences, assumptions,
and emotions are you bringing into
this session?

Objectives

1. Recognize how family members experience MAiD across.
2. Examine assumptions about family involvement in MAiD.
3. Identify how healthcare systems and implementation can shape family members' experiences.
4. Identify relational and family-aware approaches in practice.
5. Consider small practice shifts that may reduce stress and challenges for family members connected to MAiD.



MAiD in Canada



- Legalized in 2016
- Continued legislative evolution:
 - Bill C-7
 - Track I and Track II
- Increasing number of MAiD deaths annually
- Québec → advance requests for medical aid in dying in October 2024.
- Alberta → Bill 18

Federal MAiD Data: Who Is Counted?

Canadian MAiD reporting focuses primarily on:

- Autonomous individual
 - Eligibility
 - MAiD practitioners
 - Procedural information
- **Family members are minimally visible in federal reporting**



Family members are currently referenced only minimally within federal reporting.

Often related to:

- Presence at provision
- Waiver of final consent processes
- Communication/ contact roles



What has *not* been routinely captured:



- Emotional impact
- Care burden
- Bereavement experiences
- Conflict or moral distress
- Support needs

(Beuthin et al., 2021; Crumley et al., 2023; Frolic et al., 2020; Goldberg et al., 2021; Hales et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2018; Serota et al., 2024)



PAUSE

When you're caring for someone receiving palliative care, how do you tend to see and think about their family members?



PAUSE

What assumptions do you bring into interactions with family members of someone pursuing MAiD?

I didn't want to be saying "No,
you have got to hold on."



Early Conversations

Family experiences are shaped by:

- Timing of disclosure
- Prior conversations about dying
- Understanding of suffering
- Family dynamics

RESEARCH INSIGHT:

- EARLY AND GRADUAL CONVERSATIONS OFTEN INCREASE PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS.
- LATE DISCLOSURE CAN INTENSIFY UNCERTAINTY, TENSION, DISTRESS.

Understanding Suffering

Family members tend to find it easier to reconcile a loved one's decision for MAiD when:

- Suffering was understood
- Disease progression and functional decline were experienced by being connected

IMPORTANT:
UNDERSTANDING THE SUFFERING DOES NOT NECESSARILY REMOVE TENSION OR EMOTIONAL CONFLICT.

“Now What?”

When family members are informed that MAiD will be or has been requested, family members often become:

- Information seekers
- Advocates
- Coordinators
- Support for others

RESEARCH INSIGHT:

- SYSTEM CLARITY STRONGLY INFLUENCES FAMILY EXPERIENCE.
- SILENCE OR UNCERTAINTY CAN BE EXPERIENCED AS ABANDONMENT.

Anticipatory Grief

Unlike other deaths, MAiD often involves:

- A known date
- Planned goodbyes
- Emotional countdown

Family members describe:

- Living in suspension
- Feeling emotional tension
- Trying to support their loved ones and others
- Different rhythm of grief and confronting grief late in the process

Knowing the Date

“It felt surreal to know the date and time my dad would die.”

CLINICAL REFLECTION:

- LANGUAGE AROUND SCHEDULING OF MAID MATTERS.
- WHAT FEELS PROCEDURAL TO CLINICIANS FEELS PROFOUND TO FAMILY MEMBERS, BOTH EMOTIONALLY AND RELATIONALLY.

Palliative Care and MAiD

Some family members experience:

- Integrated support
- Continuity
- Compassionate collaboration

Others describe:

- Withdrawal of involvement and engagement
- Fragmentation of services
- Feeling left alone, abandoned, invisible

Saying Goodbye

MAiD can enable:

- Intentional rituals
- Gatherings
- Legacy- making
- Meaningful final conversations

Family members often describe:

- Profound closeness
- Emotional intensity
- Simultaneous gratitude and grief

Privacy and Stigma

Many family members carefully manage disclosure because of:

- Fear of judgment
- Stigma
- Concerns about their community
- Protecting vulnerable relatives

RESEARCH INSIGHT:

NEED FOR PRIVACY OFTEN BEGINS IN THE SETTING (ESP, WHEN THERE ARE RESTRICTIONS) AND CONTINUES INTO BEREAVEMENT. CREATES AND INCREASES FEELINGS OF ISOLATION.

After the Death

Family members carry:

- Questions
- Tension
- Relief
- Ambivalence
- Peace
- Silence

CLINICAL REFLECTION:

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROVIDED IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, AND THAT FAMILY MEMBERS ARE COMFORTABLE WITH (MAiD-specific), IS OFTEN INCONSISTENT OR ABSENT.

In my research and other studies, family members describe needing:

- Clear, unprompted information
- Consistent communication
- Lack of fragmentation, greater integration of care and services
- Emotional acknowledgment
- Continued palliative care presence (if their loved one is receiving PC)
- Understanding, and even permission, for emotional complexity

Emerging Evidence: Peer Support

Research suggests that lived-experience peer support may help:

- Normalize emotional reactions
- Reduce isolation
- Increase preparedness
- Improve confidence in navigating the healthcare system and the MAiD process

KEY INSIGHT:
INFORMATION ITSELF CAN BE A
WAY TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT.

The impact of lived experience peer support for family members can differ based on:

- Track I, Track II, underlying medical condition
- Geographic location (rural, urban)
- Cultural/ religious context
- Family role and structure
- MAiD access

MAiD - specific peer support can be invaluable:



Bridge C - 14



MAiD Family Support
Society (MFSS)

These supports can help family members *before* and *after* a MAiD death

Suggestions for Practice

Practice with insight

- Recognize family members as part of the MAiD care context
- Avoid assuming alignment or readiness
- Maintain palliative involvement
- Explain the process clearly; seek out information, and share the knowledge
- Normalize emotional ambivalence and uncertainty
- Offer support before family members ask *and* before the MAiD event.



Relational Practice

Patient - centred care and family awareness can coexist.

Metaphor: Like adjusting a camera lens—
the patient remains in focus while the
family stays in frame.



What do you want family members to remember about their experience with:



- **The healthcare team?**
- **The healthcare system?**
- **You?**

**Family members are much more than witnesses
to a loved one's choice**

**THEY ARE NOT SIMPLY OBSERVERS AND
BYSTANDERS OF THE MAID PROCESS AND
DEATH**

They are often:

- Advocates for and facilitators of MAiD access
- Interpreters and translators of their loved one's suffering to others
- Moral labourers
- Managers of after-death elements
- Memory-keepers long after care ends

WHAT IS ONE SMALL SHIFT YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR PRACTICE TO BETTER ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT FAMILY MEMBERS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES AROUND MAID?





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Evaluation



<https://redcap.link/ds6ibuxf>

Upcoming Session

Stay tuned for next year's series

For more information contact: sheila.killoran@covenanthealth.ca





Thank You!

Stay Connected

- Visit [Palliative Institute | Covenant Health](https://covenanthealth.ca) (covenanthealth.ca) to access all our tools and resources.
- Contact us at: Palliative.Institute@covenanthealth.ca

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