

Doctor-assisted dying: Quebec consensus needs rebuilding

Montréal, April 14, 2016 – The Regroupement provincial des comités des usagers (RPCU), the primary spokesperson for users of Quebec's health and social services network, believes that the bill on doctor-assisted dying that was tabled in the House of Commons today breaks an established consensus in Quebec regarding conditions of eligibility for doctor-assisted dying.

Quebec's *Act Respecting End of Life Care* (Section 26, Paragraph 4) states that only people suffering from a serious and incurable illness may obtain medical aid in dying. However, the proposed *Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)* extends eligibility to people who have "a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability."

"This expansion of the eligibility criteria to include disability breaks the consensus established in Quebec regarding the scope of medically assisted dying, which only applied to people in an end-of-life situation," believes Pierre Blain, director general of the RPCU. "Are we opening the door to assisted suicide?" he wondered.

The RPCU is also pondering the concept of a "nurse practitioner or any other equivalent title," according to the provinces, being able to administer, prescribe or provide a substance that would cause a person's death. Does this concept include "specialized nurse practitioners," who are currently authorized to perform a number of medical procedures and prescribe medications?

However, the RPCU is pleased to see that the threat facing physicians – with respect to how the nature of their actions in providing medically assisted dying is interpreted by the Criminal Code – has now been eliminated. Bill C-14 stipulates that a physician who provides medical aid in dying is not committing culpable homicide. If the criteria in this legislation are met, the physician is not committing a crime.

The Bill also states that loved ones and descendants will not be penalized for a decision made by a person who resorts to doctor-assisted dying.

About the RPCU

The Regroupement provincial des comités des usagers (RPCU) advocates on behalf of users, and is the spokesperson for the 600 user and in-patient committees in Quebec's health and social services establishments. The committees' mission is to defend users' rights and to work to improve the quality of services provided to users of the health and social services network. The RPCU also advocates for the elderly and for youth.

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