

## **The AQDR and Euthanasia**

### **A study and survey by Mr. Ronald St-Jean**

The AQDR (Quebec association for defending the rights of retirees and pre-retirees) has long been interested in all aspects of the lives of seniors, including the time nearing their end of life. The organization never shied away from issues regarding the right to seek medical assistance, to end one's life without intolerable suffering. The AQDR has led numerous discussions on this topic among its members, in addition to being one of the most active organizations in promoting the use of the living will.

Ronald St-Jean was in charge of the "euthanasia" project when the AQDR conducted a survey, interviewing 540 people. Mr. St-Jean is the first to admit that this is not a scientific survey, but his data speaks volumes.

### **Here are some highlights from Mr. St-Jean's report**

Question: In your opinion, is a new law regarding euthanasia necessary?  
86% of respondents believe in the need for a law or changes to the current legislation, whether it is for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Question: Personally, would you be in favour of or opposed to a law allowing physicians to terminate the lives of persons suffering from a painful and irreversible illness, if they requested it?  
81% of respondents are completely in favour or somewhat in favour of a law that would authorize physicians to end the life of a person with an irreversible disease, with the consent of the family.

Question: Should we be able to choose how we want to die?  
81% of respondents are totally in favour or somewhat in favour of allowing freedom of choice. We need serious guidelines to frame this practice. Longevity is not synonymous with quality of life, and sometimes quality of life is zero.

The legal will or the protection mandate (in case of incapacity) listing a person's last will must be respected.

Question: Can we avoid and/or limit therapeutic obstinacy?  
On this question, the answers are more divided.

Those in favour and somewhat in favour make up a total of 57%.

Those who are fully opposed make up 31%.

More uncertainty is seen in the answers to this question. Almost 13% of respondents abstained.

## **Primary goal of the survey**

The main purpose of the survey was to allow seniors to express themselves freely. We found, based on the feedback received, that they believe the final decision should rest with the person who wishes to leave, with respect and dignity. They stated, "Respect our last wishes."

Respondents do not all have the same perception of euthanasia and assisted suicide; this is dependent upon whether a person lives in a major city or a rural area. In general, people in rural areas tend to be more conservative and committed to the principles of religious teachings. As for the matter of ending therapeutic obstinacy, a certain number answered "Yes, but within an established framework to avoid any abuse." A bioethics committee will be very important here. "In each establishment, someone in charge should be designated to enforce the law."

"In addition, without killing the patient, nor opting for therapeutic obstinacy, people can continue to live with a certain level of comfort, if we can relieve pain that would be too intense; they will leave when they are ready, when they will have had contact with their entire family. Religion, beliefs, faith are all relevant; patients' points of view are heavily influenced by the values of the Christian faith that guided them for their entire life. These values can affect a person's tolerance for suffering and their acceptance of death, without outside intervention."

## **Conclusion**

Whether we use the words "euthanasia" or "assisted suicide," the situation still is as delicate as ever. They describe a death that is premature or induced, which may be difficult for certain members of the family to accept when they find themselves forced to respect wishes expressed by a loved one.

Many people want the approval of two physicians other than the family doctor, to make this irreversible decision. A few countries have adopted this approach, performing euthanasia with the approval of these physicians. We will have to wait for results from the House of Commons reflection, if Madame Francine Lalonde introduces her bill, now that there is a new legislature in Ottawa.

Human beings do not fear death, but they fear suffering.

Ronald St-Jean