

Dying With Dignity: The Ultimate Freedom

Founded in 2007, the Association québécoise pour le droit de mourir dans la dignité (AQDMD), works to ensure that legislation will allow every citizen to choose and receive end-of-life care that includes medical assistance in dying, in accordance with their own concept of dignity.

What are the guiding principles behind this mission?

1.— Respect for the autonomy of every person

Patient autonomy and respect for the wishes that they have stated: these are fundamental principles of medical ethics, in accordance with human rights, as defined by the Civil Code of Québec.

“The integration of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Charter of Rights into our legislation has had a significant impact on the right of each individual to control their own body.” (Brief from the Barreau du Québec, Translated)

Today, any person recognized as capable can refuse any medical exam and any treatment, even if this may threaten their life. By virtue of every person's right to autonomy, any capable adult suffering from an incurable disease or experiencing physical or psychological suffering, which the person considers unbearable, must be given the opportunity, legitimately, to request and receive assistance in dying when and how they see fit.

Before making an informed decision, the patient must have been advised of all treatment or palliative care options that are available to them. This request for assistance in dying must be made free of any coercion and made by a person with the capacity to consent. Under these conditions, the decision thus rests with the primary party concerned: the patient.

2.- Dying according to one's own values

The concept of dignity is very personal: some live with an incurable disease or a major disability without considering ending their life, while others believe that being totally dependent and unable to enjoy life as they see fit is an indignity. The same is true when judging pain and suffering; only the patient can attest to the intolerable nature of this suffering. The final assessment of a person's state of existence rests with the patient.

3.— The importance of compassion

Faced with the decriminalization of assisted suicide and/or euthanasia, some fear that patients may consider themselves to be a burden on those around them and request assistance in dying. The feeling that one is becoming a burden is only one facet of suffering, which is multifactorial: increasing weakness that leads to the loss of all autonomy, reduced mobility and ability to care of oneself, a state of decline without the prospect of improvement. For many patients, the loss of their personal identity rids their life of meaning and affects their dignity. This suffering is difficult to treat and requires active compassion from those close to the person, respecting their values and their wishes.

4.— End-of-life care

In recent decades, the world of palliative care has made great strides in pain relief, but not all end-of-life suffering can be alleviated in all circumstances.

5.— Framework for MAID

The process of medical assistance in dying is essentially directed by free, informed, and reiterated requests made by the patient. The medical community must ensure that, according to rules determined by law, the patient has decision-making capacity.

6.— Respect for a different perspective

A person can choose to put their life and death in the hands of their god. For this person, all life is better than death, even in the most difficult times. However, no individual has the right to impose this view on another person; this is a matter of personal and individual beliefs.

August 2021