

Quebec's Dying With Dignity Bill

A Dying With Dignity law passed with a huge majority of votes in the National Assembly of the Province of Quebec.

Bill 52, *An Act Respecting End of Life Care* became law by a vote of 94 to 22, on June 5, 2014. This legislation permits assisted dying and euthanasia for terminally ill patients in the province of Quebec, Canada. The debate about the issues came about following the publication, in 2009, of a major discussion paper on the topic, by the College of Medicine of Quebec. This paper concluded that, under exceptional circumstances, and with consideration of safeguards for those who may be vulnerable citizens, due to disability or other risks, euthanasia could be the final step in the *continuum of appropriate end-of-life care*.

In the five years since then, a Select Committee on Dying With Dignity was created by a motion in the National Assembly, and passed unanimously. These elected representatives from various political parties began deliberations in 2010. They heard from hundreds of experts, individuals, and organizations at many meetings, as well as visiting France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Several polls revealed a majority of citizens of Quebec were in favor of euthanasia.

It is impressive to read the full report of this Select Committee, published in March, 2012. They considered testimony from those in support and those opposed. They heard details of the laws in Europe and in the United States. Their conclusions resulted in the Committee making firm recommendations that medical aid in dying be recognized as appropriate end-of-life care. The person requesting assisted dying must meet stringent criteria, and a strict protocol must be followed by physicians who accommodate the request of the patient.

In 2013, Bill 52 was presented to the National Assembly of Quebec. It was accepted for discussion with all elected representatives being able to vote their conscience, free of party allegiance. Even though there was a change in the party having the majority of representation in the Assembly, from the one originally responsible for the Bill, it was passed into law on June 5, 2014. This bill has the unique aspect of including assisted dying under the Health Act of the Province of Quebec, removing it from criminal law statutes. This will, in all likelihood, face challenges from the Federal government in Ottawa, Ontario, since, under the Federal Justice Department, assisted dying is illegal under criminal law.

The leaders of the Dying With Dignity Association of Quebec (AQDMD), and other Right To Die organizations, along with the leaders of the physician groups in Quebec, who supported the concept, all deserve commendation from the entire membership of the World Federation of Right To Die Societies. The elected representatives and the people of Quebec also must be acknowledged for their courage

and determination to accept responsibility to listen to the thoroughly discussed issues reflecting what the public wanted as a right near the end of life.

The physicians of the Province who, through their representatives in the College of Medicine, supported the decision to initiate the discussions that led to this Select Committee, are also to be commended for their foresight and courage in bringing Dying With Dignity to a full debate throughout the Province. Since the vast majority of citizens of Quebec had been shown, in several polls, to support this measure, physicians were responding appropriately to the wishes of their patients.

At the World Federation of Right To Die Societies biennial conference to be held in Chicago in September, 2014, hosted by Final Exit Network, the leaders of the Quebec Dying With Dignity groups, as well as the politician most responsible for the success of Bill 52, Madam Veronique Hivon, will be presenting the details of the successful passage of this most unique approach to permitting patients the right to have some control over how, where and when they die, when faced with illness that will end their life.

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