Paramedic Professionals and Medical Assistance in Dying “MAID”

Canadian Bill C14
Objectives

1. To provide a basic overview of MAID implementation in Canada

2. To identify areas where Paramedics have become involved

3. To identify Paramedic practice considerations

4. To share practice challenges that have arisen since MAID came into effect
Patient wishes…

Carter v Canada

• A landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision in which the prohibition of assisted suicide was challenged as being contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

• Unanimous Decision on Feb. 6, 2015 striking down the Criminal Code provision
Additional Criminal Code Changes: June 2016

Following the Carter v Canada decision, the Criminal Code needed amendment to permit medical assistance in dying under certain conditions...
Bill C14: Medical Assistance in Dying

- The law indemnifies specific medical professionals from prosecution under the Criminal Code

- Paramedics are not included in this exemption
Under the Criminal Code...

Despite MAID changes, it is still a crime to assist someone to commit suicide or to counsel them to commit suicide (p.241(b) Criminal Code)
What is Medical Assistance in Dying?

Two options exist for eligible patients:

• Voluntary euthanasia
• Medically assisted suicide
What is an Eligible Patient?

...and why is this important to the paramedic?
Who determines eligibility?

- The **Physician or Nurse Practitioner** are the only ones who can make this determination.

- Attending paramedics **must** verify eligibility before engaging in any support activity; they actually need to see the documentation.
Why is this definition used?
Does this really help?

IRREMEDIABLE MEDICAL CONDITION?
Patients cite their primary motivation as being a loss of control, a loss of dignity and a desire to not be dependent on others for personal care\(^1\).

PATIENTS RARELY REQUEST “MAID” FOR UNCONTROLLED PAIN...

“Informed Consent”
The patient must be mentally competent to make decisions at the time that the service is provided....

Can you see a problem with this?
Who Can Provide Assistance

Any healthcare professional can provide support, but not without obligations and liability...
What about Conscientious Objection?

Paramedics are allowed express objection to participating but...

What do they do when other laws prohibit them from refusing service?
PARAMEDIC PRACTICE
IMPLICATIONS...
The potential for issues is massive…

Paramedics could be found guilty of culpable homicide unless they can bring their actions within the approved terms and activities defined in the legislation…
“Why would Paramedics ever need to be involved?”

- Paramedics are often the first called when medical emergencies occur
- Paramedic skill sets are needed to support Physicians and NPs
Patient Self-administration...

NOW LET’S FURTHER COMPLICATE THIS...
Bill C14 explicitly acknowledges that self-administration of medication should be a viable option...
Non-supervised self-administration can lead to complications

- Of 991 patients who self-administered medication, ~486 did not have a medical practitioner present.
- 4.9% complication rate (mostly regurgitation).
- 6 reported cases of patients regaining consciousness.
- Death ranged from 1 minute to 104 hours post ingestion; median time of 25 minutes.

Research continued…

Of 114 cases using self-administered medications:

- 10% had some technical problem
- 7% had complications
- 15% had longer than expected time to death or never actually became comatose
- Median time to death was 30 minutes (range: 1 minute to 14 days)
- In 18% of cases, physician decided to administer a legal medication intravenously

GIVEN THESE STATS, CAN YOU SEE HOW FAMILY MAY CALL FOR HELP?

Time to death of up to 104 hours
What is the appropriate treatment response...

The paramedic is called to a scene where the patient is struggling to die and they know that the patient is part of a MAID process?

The patient changes their mind...
Can a family member with medical power of attorney supersede the patient’s wishes?

Bottom line...NO
THE PARAMEDIC IS CALLED IN TO HELP RESUSCITATE AND KNOWS IT’S A “MAID” CASE

The family panics…
Worst possible secret…

THE PARAMEDIC IS NOT TOLD IT IS A MAID CASE…
What if self-administered meds don’t work and the family wants the paramedic to help their loved one die…

WHAT ABOUT SUPPORTING DEATH?
What constitutes participation in MAID by the Paramedic?
Thin Edge of the Wedge…

Starting an IV is considered participation in MAID if that IV is intended for medication administration…

What about providing symptom relief while transporting the patient to the MAID facility?
Legal Opinion

The Paramedic can only assist a Physician or Nurse Practitioner... not the patient

What does this mean in reality?
Liability

In Saskatchewan, paramedics are not required to have liability coverage...yet
What’s missing?

- An understanding by officials that paramedics are actually being included in the process, often without their knowledge

- A script for non-physician/non-nurse practitioner healthcare providers to use in advising patients

- A process map for these same healthcare providers (the current map only contemplates the involvement of the 3 defined practitioners)
Environmental Scan

This is new to healthcare and paramedicine is no different...
MAID in Canada: Are Paramedics ready?

Thoughts and Questions?