



News Release

Hospice Palliative Care – A Human Right

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(May 7, 2009, St. Catharines) – “Every year, millions of people around the world living with a terminal illness suffer unnecessary pain and distress, either unaware of or unable to access the care they need.” While Archbishop Desmond Tutu was speaking mainly about third world countries when he made his comment, his concerns apply to Canada as well. At best, no more than 36% of Canadians who need hospice palliative care services have access to it, and those living in rural and remote areas have dramatically less access.

National Hospice Palliative Care Week, May 3 to 9, is an opportunity for all Canadians to reflect on the importance of accessibility to quality end-of-life care. This year, the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association (CHPCA) and the National Hospice Palliative Care Committee 2009 have chosen to build upon World Hospice Palliative Care Day’s campaign: Hospice Palliative Care: A Human Right. Even in a first world country like Canada where public health care is available, Canadians still die in pain, separated from their loved ones and at times far from home.

“It is alarming how many dying Canadians do not have access to quality end-of-life care,” stated Dr. Larry Librach, President of the CHPCA. “Hospice palliative care is a human right,” he continued. “We should all have access to health care when we need it. We should all have access to quality care from the beginning to the end of life.”

Beth Ellis, Chair of the HNHB Hospice Palliative Care Network indicates that fewer than ten percent of Ontarians will die suddenly and unexpectedly. This means that more than ninety percent will die from progressive life-limiting illness that causes a person’s health to decline over a course of time. This timeframe may be anywhere from several years, to a few months or weeks or even just a few days. The experience of the person in this situation (and his family) often includes suffering on a variety of levels, which can sometimes be significant. All people living with or affected by progressive life-limiting illness deserve “to receive care that aims to relieve their suffering and improve their quality of living and dying and to receive this care from health care providers and organizations that work together within a system that is responsive to these issues.

The HNHB Hospice Palliative Care Network is one mechanism that is working steadily to accomplish this goal. The Network is a partnership of stakeholders who work together collaboratively to plan, coordinate, implement and evaluate a system of quality hospice palliative care across the HNHB LHIN area. We share the vision of ensuring quality Hospice Palliative Care for all individuals in the HNHB LHIN area.

The network includes representatives from the continuum of care across volunteer services to tertiary care. The system of care that we envision is a place where Quality Hospice Palliative Care is available and accessible for all individuals in the HNHB LHIN area. The Network has many committees and subcommittees working on service delivery, education, research/evaluation and advocacy projects. These initiatives are focused on working towards greater system collaboration, seamlessness and equity.

Brother Richard MacPhee, Chair of the Advocacy and Communications Committee appreciates the words of John Oxenham, a poet who says “For Death begins with life’s first breath and life begins at touch of death.” Brother Richard asks, then why is it that we seem to expend so much on the human rights of individuals while they live but refuse to recognize those same human rights of people when they journey towards the end of their life. Isn’t the desire to die free of pain, in a place of comfort and warmth with those around you whom you love, a realistic expectation and in fact a basic human right that we all deserve. Palliative Care in many cases is more of a high touch less tech approach to health care. What it provides is the essential human compassion and medical supports to assist a person in their final days of life.

All Canadians have the right to die with dignity, free of pain, surrounded by their loved ones, in a setting of their choice. It is crucial that the Canadian healthcare system have the programs and services in place to provide the quality end-of-life care that Canadians need. Please contact Julie Darnay, Director, Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Hospice Palliative Care Network at 1-866-790-4642 ext.3752 for further information.

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