



Policy Title: Responding to Requests for Medical Assistance in Dying (Physician Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia)
Policy Number: 8.1.68P
Category: Administration
Classification: Life, Safety and Environment
Sub-Classification: Risk Management
Date Issued:
Date Last Reviewed (r)/Revised (R)

POLICY PROCEDURE/PROTOCOL GUIDELINE

SECTION 1 – INITIATION

Title:

Responding to Requests for Medical Assistance in Dying (Physician Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia)

NEW REVISED

Preamble:

St. Joseph's General Hospital is guided in who we are and in all that we do by our Mission, Vision, Values and Ethical Framework.

In an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity for all patients, residents, staff and volunteers, the following policy and procedure is intended to describe behavior which fulfills our Mission, *Care with Compassion*.

Statement:

As a Catholic health care organization, St. Joseph's General Hospital (SJGH) is committed to the inherent dignity of every human being throughout the entire continuum of life from conception to natural death. The organization's ethical and moral opposition to provide Physician Assisted Suicide (herein Medical Assistance in Dying [MAiD]) needs to be recognized, respected and honoured by all persons served by, or working within St. Joseph's General Hospital including, but not limited to funders, regulatory bodies, advocacy groups and the larger community.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to provide a consistent ethical and compassionate approach, reflective of the *Health Ethics Guide* and Catholic teaching when responding to expressed requests for Medical Assistance in Dying (Physician Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia) within St. Joseph's General Hospital.

SECTION 2 – DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibility:

While St. Joseph's General Hospital personnel shall neither unnecessarily prolong nor hasten death, the organization reaffirms its commitment to provide quality palliative and/or hospice end-of-life care, as well as compassionate support for dying persons and their families, including:

1. Honouring patient/resident self-determination through the use of advance care planning, goals of care designation, and/or personal directives, including recognition of the role of substitute decision-makers/agents chosen by and acting on behalf of the patient/resident;
2. Offering quality palliative/hospice and end-of-life care that addresses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of persons and their families; and
3. Delivering effective and timely pain and symptom management as outlined in the *Health Ethics Guide*, the foundational ethics resource used by St. Joseph's General Hospital and other Canadian Catholic health care organizations.



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Principles:

Expressed requests from persons in our care for MAiD should be respectfully acknowledged in a non-coercive and non-discriminatory manner.

Although SJGH and its personnel are prohibited from participating and assisting in any actions or omissions that are directly intended to cause death, the values of SJGH nevertheless ethically oblige personnel to explore and ascertain the nature of the person's expressed request.

This response should focus on providing information and access to appropriate physical, psychological and spiritual supports to help address the person's needs that may underlie their expressed request.

This policy recognizes that suffering is part of the human experience which occurs throughout life and not necessarily related to dying. A person in deep existential anguish needs to be appropriately supported to acknowledge, address, and ameliorate their suffering. The goal of care is to reduce such suffering.

As a publicly-funded institution, SJGH recognizes that the personnel serving persons in our care may be conflicted when responding to a request for MAiD given the range of societal views on the issue. SJGH has an institutional obligation to uphold its principles of faith and morals by which it is bound as a Catholic health provider and as recognized by the *Master Agreement*, with the Ministry of Health Services, and its *Affiliation Agreement* between Island Health and St. Joseph's General Hospital.

SJGH is morally and legally bound to work together with both patients and personnel to resolve potential conflict around goals of care to enable proactive solutions that respect the wishes and integrity of all. In some cases, this may require safe and timely transfer of a patient and their records to a non-objecting institution for continued exploratory discussion and assessment. Consistent with SJGH's mission and values, care in arranging such transfer must be provided in a compassionate and non-discriminatory manner.

The position and policies of SJGH are based on the *Health Ethics Guide* and the Catholic fundamental values of respect for the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, compassionate care of dying and vulnerable persons, and respect for the integrity of the medical, nursing, and allied health professions. The policy recognizes the long standing Catholic moral tradition of neither prolonging death by subjecting persons in care to disproportionately burdensome, medically inappropriate or futile treatments, nor intentionally hastening their death through assisted suicide and/or voluntary euthanasia.

As affirmed in *Our Commitment to Ethical Integrity* and in the *Health Ethics Guide*, SJGH will support those in good conscience who cannot participate in an activity deemed to be immoral or contrary to their professional codes of conduct and moral beliefs. It is our responsibility to do so without abandoning those who may be impacted by such conscientious or professional decisions by reviewing extenuating circumstances on a case- by-case basis and exercising prudential judgment.

Support will be available for all staff that might experience moral distress or a need to debrief while they are providing care for a patient who has requested Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). The Coordinator of Spiritual Care and Ethics will be available to answer any questions or address any concerns that they may have pertaining to MAiD, our policy and care plan.