

Provincial Working Group on Medical Assistance in Dying
Recommendations of the Sub-Working Group on Self-Administration

Background & Context

In early 2016 the Ministry of Health established a provincial working group on medical assistance in dying (MAID), with representatives from the regional health authorities, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association, Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals, and the Saskatchewan Medical Association. The intent of establishing the working group was to utilize a collaborative approach to the introduction of MAID in Saskatchewan, and to ensure a newly-implemented MAID regime represents and addresses the views and perspectives of a broad range of affected stakeholders.

Through the work of the provincial MAID working group, a number of standard forms and decision aids have been created to assist practitioners and standardize practice across the province. This work has included:

- arranging for a single point of contact for patient and provider information in each health region; and,
- developing and using standardized forms and protocols to comply with the requirements of federal legislation and permit consistency in recording and reporting.

In accordance with the recommendations of the provincial working group on MAID, professional regulatory bodies have implemented policies and guidelines that further enforce the agreed-upon provincial processes and standards with respect to practitioner administered MAID.

Sub-Working Group on Self-Administration of MAID

In summer 2016, it was recognized that the issue of self-administration of MAID presented additional clinical, legal, and ethical issues that merited further collaboration and attention. At that time, it was agreed that a sub-working group of the larger provincial working group would be established (see Appendix A) to examine the issue of self-administration. As of November 30, 2016, the sub-working group had met three times to discuss and build consensus on the below recommendations.

Recommendations regarding Self-Administration of Medical Assistance in Dying

The sub-working group recognizes that the federal legislation provides for the legal provision of both practitioner-administered and self-administered forms of medical assistance in dying in Canada, provided that a patient meets all eligibility criteria and all legal safeguards have been met.

The group also recognizes that, in the absence of provincial legislation, professional regulatory bodies retain the right and authority to make decisions respecting their profession's participation in medical assistance in dying through the establishment of policies, standards, and/or practice guidelines.

Recognizing the above, the group has established the following recommendations regarding the implementation of self-administration of medical assistance in dying in Saskatchewan.

Recommendation #1: The sub-working group recommends that medical and nurse practitioners who provide medical assistance in dying or participate in the assessment process for medical assistance in dying require formal authorization through their respective regulatory body and/or regional health authority prior to their involvement. The group recognizes that such an authorization process has not yet been implemented and further recommends that the establishment of a standardized approach to an authorization process be pursued over the coming months.

Recommendation #2: The sub-working group recommends that, for an agreed-upon period of time (not yet defined), authorized practitioners who provide medical assistance in dying, either through the administration of the pharmaceutical agent or the provision of an oral compound for patient self-administration, be required to personally attend at the time the medication is administered. Whether a patient has requested to self-administer the lethal prescription or have a practitioner administer the substance, that practitioner will also have readily available a backup intravenous kit for medical assistance in dying in the event that complications arise. The practitioner attending the MAID death will notify the Coroner of the death as currently required by law. The Coroner will be responsible for completing the death certificate.

Recommendation #3: The sub-working group recommends that the requirements outlined in Recommendation #2 be reviewed by an appropriate body after an agreed-upon period of time. Central to such a review would be consideration of whether the approach represents a balanced framework that offers appropriate safeguards for vulnerable individuals while respecting the wishes and personal convictions of patients, families, and health care providers.

Recommendation #4: The sub-working group recommends that all pharmaceutical agents required for the administration of medical assistance in dying, administered either through practitioner administration or patient self-administration means, be dispensed according to a provincial pharmaceutical protocol and distribution process.

Recommendation #5: The sub-working group recommends that all pharmaceutical agents required for the administration of medical assistance in dying, administered either through practitioner administration or patient self-administration means, be dispensed directly to the practitioner who will attend the patient's death. It is further recommended that, where possible and appropriate, that regional and community pharmacies involved in the preparation of MAID kits will work collaboratively to ensure that the primary MAID kit and back-up kit can be dispensed from a single point of contact in order to ensure ease of access for the practitioner who will attend the death.

Appendix A: Sub-Working Group Membership

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan

- Dr. Karen Shaw, Registrar and CEO
- Bryan Salte, Associate Registrar and Legal Counsel

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association

- Carolyn Hoffman, Executive Director
- Barbara MacDonald, Nursing Advisor, Practice

Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals

- Ray Joubert, Registrar
- Jeanette Sandiford, Field Officer

Saskatchewan Medical Association

- Dr. Werner Oberholzer, Director, Physician Advocacy and Leadership

Regional Health Authority Representatives

- Dr. Rob Weiler, Associate Senior Medical Officer, Saskatoon Health Region
- Evert Van Olst, Legal Counsel, Saskatoon Health Region
- Dr. Carmen Johnson, Medical Director, Palliative Care Services, Pasqua Hospital, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region

Ministry of Health Representatives

- Michelle Schmalenberg, Director, Strategy and Innovation Branch
- Jonathan Harris, Senior Policy Analyst, Strategy and Innovation Branch
- Caroline Beck, Senior Policy Analyst, Strategy and Innovation Branch
- Justin Moen, Director, Medical Services Branch
- David Guerrero, Senior Insured Services Consultant, Medical Services Branch
- Janis Johnson, Regional Pharmaceutical Consultant, Drug Plan and Extended Benefits Branch