

Medical Assistance in Dying

The unit I manage has been identified as a location where patients will be admitted for medical assistance in dying. Some of the RNs have expressed the ethical conflict they experience in relation to caring for a patient who is choosing to end their life. What am I responsible for? What are RNs responsible for?

- Medical Assistance in Dying is an emotion filled topic which has an impact on many nurses. Discussing the topic with your staff in an open and respectful manner will assist your staff to express ethical conflict and come to resolution for how to address requests when they are made.
- Organizational policies created by direct care providers and other healthcare professionals should be in place to clearly articulate the role of the RN when being involved with medical assistance in dying.
- RNs have the right to conscientiously object to being involved with medical assistance in dying. Steps to declaring a conflict can be found in the CNA Code of Ethics (1). Ideally, the declaration should be made proactively and well ahead of an actual situation in order to facilitate ethically safe care for the client.
- Ethically, RNs are accountable for ensuring a person's care needs are met and that the nurse does not abandon those in need of nursing care. This means the RN is responsible for caring for the patient until other care arrangements can be made (2).
- There is no law or professional standard that requires a RN to be involved in the process of medical assistance in dying (3).
- RNs are responsible for providing care respecting the client's health choices (4).

Q&A

- **What is the role of the RN who receives a request for medical assistance in dying?**
The RN's role is:
 - to listen to the client's request;
 - possibly explore the reasons for the request within the context of a conversation which includes other end of life care options, such as palliative care;
 - appropriately refer the person to a medical or nurse practitioner to obtain the necessary information about medical assistance in dying and
 - to document that the conversation was initiated by the patient (5).
- **If a RN refers a patient to a medical or nurse practitioner with the intent of arranging for medical assistance in dying, is the RN a collaborator in homicide or suicide?**
No. Bill C-14 provides exemptions to the Criminal Code for persons aiding in medical assistance in dying. This means, you, as an RN will not be held criminally responsible for assisting with medical assistance in dying. This protects the RNs who are at the bedside actively assisting in the procedure and those who assist a patient in accessing information (6 and 7).

RN is used to represent all SRNA members including RN(NP)s and RN(AAP)s.

- **Can a RN(NP) administer medical assistance in dying?**

Yes. RN(NP)s have been named in Bill C-14 as practitioners who are able to administer medical assistance in dying. RN(NP)s are required to follow provincial protocols; meet SRNA standards of practice; and ensure they have the competence to administer medical assistance in dying (8).

SRNA Resources

[Code of Ethics for registered nurses, 2008](#)

[Standards and Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses, 2013](#)

[Guideline for RN\(NP\) Involvement in Medical Assistance in Dying, 2016](#)

[Guideline for RN Involvement in Medical Assistance in Dying, 2016](#)

External Resources

[Bill C-14](#)

[Criminal Code](#)

Resource Key		
Number	Resource	Reference
1	Code of Ethics (2008)	p. 44-46
2	Code of Ethics (2008)	p. 19 and 43
3	Guideline for RN Involvement in Medical Assistance in Dying, 2016	p. 2
4	Standards and Foundation Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurses (2013)	Competency 65, p. 15
5	Guideline for RN Involvement in Medical Assistance in Dying, 2016	p. 4
6	Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)	
7	Criminal Code	

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