



Supreme Court decision awakens raw feelings, divergent views

OPPOSING VIEWS ON THE SUPREME Court's decision regarding assisted dying are to be expected, but they should not be used to drive a wedge between nurses, or between nursing and the public. Differing personal values can be difficult to embrace, but we must all look beyond our own beliefs and respect those of others. The court's ruling is not only a decision that will affect the journey of terminally ill patients under our care. It's a decision that will affect our own personal journeys and those of our loved ones.

So, what's next for nurses? In my view, it is critical for nurses – individually and collectively – to push for two top priorities. First, advocating for substantial funding improvements so we can ensure universal access to comprehensive palliative care in all regions of the province and country. Palliative care is not about going somewhere to die; it's about living, as fully as possible, and without intolerable suffering. To enable this, more dedicated funding is needed.

The second priority is the establishment of a principled regulatory framework to translate the Supreme Court's decision into policy. Such a framework should be national, but, if the federal government chooses to remain passive, an Ontario-made framework is vital. In the absence of such a framework, assisted dying will remain a private decision between a patient and physician. Private

conversations of this nature – at one's most vulnerable time in life – are, at best, troublesome. A protective framework – guided by firmly agreed-upon principles – is critical because it serves to ensure nobody is in a position to take advantage of vulnerable individuals at the end of their lives. And no health professional is obliged to participate in any activity or situation against

medically assisted death has led to impassioned debate on multiple aspects and sides of this sensitive issue. Offering a platform for ongoing discussion is yet another example of RNAO's courage when it comes to tackling difficult topics through a nursing lens. I'm proud that our association does not shy away from controversy, particularly when that controversy affects

“OFFERING A PLATFORM FOR ONGOING DISCUSSION IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF RNAO’S COURAGE WHEN IT COMES TO TACKLING DIFFICULT TOPICS THROUGH A NURSING LENS.”

their wishes or beliefs (see page 12 for details on RNAO's proposed principles).

What is critical now is that governments need to get on with the task of engaging the public in a formal consultation to transform the Supreme Court's decision into a policy and practice framework.

As your CEO, I am very proud of our courageous board of directors and consultation representatives at the 2014 annual general meeting, who brought forward a resolution and passed it (respectively), initiating a public discussion on this issue, which touches every one of us and everyone we know.

The court's decision to strike down Canada's law prohibiting

the lives of our patients and the public at large.

Over the past year, I have been asked several times to share my personal view. I won't do that because it's irrelevant. My role as your CEO is to represent the association and the views of members, and on this topic the views are varied. This conversation is far too important to focus on any single individual's personal perspective. If we do that, we diminish the importance of the issue, and the varied views of the public. At the end of the day, this is not only an issue that affects health professions such as nursing and medicine. This is about larger societal beliefs, and how Canadians want to move forward.

The only personal view I have is that RNAO should never shy away from difficult questions and issues. Approval of the board's resolution at last year's AGM shows members' support for a public conversation and for lending our expertise and voice to the ongoing discussions.

Whatever your view on assisted dying, it's vital that each and every RN, NP and nursing student in Ontario be part of the dialogue; as a nurse and as a Canadian. It hasn't been – and won't be – easy to work our way through the many complexities of this fundamental issue. As the public dialogue continues with nurses' full participation, RNAO will continue in its efforts to increase awareness of, and demand funding for, universal access to evidence-based palliative care.

We will also continue to engage with members, the public and other health professionals in shaping new mechanisms and regulations that, above all else, protect society and respect peoples' wishes, as well as protect health providers.

As I often say: We all have a right to our own views, but it's dangerous to disregard those who don't share the same perspectives. We need to work together to ensure this process is respectful, and keeps the patient's best interests and wishes at the forefront. **RN**

DORIS GRINSPUN, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD (HON), O.ONT, IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF RNAO.