

# B.C. hospice resists government pressure to provide euthanasia

A suburban Vancouver hospice is prepared to forgo hundreds of thousands of dollars in government funding rather than bow to government pressure to provide euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The Delta Hospice Society has been ordered to provide medically-induced death at the 10-bed Irene Thomas Hospice by Feb. 3. But the hospice president says it will forfeit \$750,000 in government funding rather than start providing lethal injections.

“MAiD (so-called medical aid in dying) is completely incompatible with palliative hospice care. It’s diametrically opposed,” Angelina Ireland told the *B.C. Catholic* on Jan. 17.

The demand to provide patients at the end of life the option of assisted suicide came from the Fraser Health Authority and B.C. Health Minister Adrian Dix. But Ireland contends that deliberately ending a patient’s life violates the institution’s charter to provide compassionate care and support for persons in the last stages of living, “so that they may live as fully and comfortably as possible.”

A statement from the hospice said it finds itself in the “difficult position” of either honouring its charter and legal obligations or acceding to what Ireland calls “an agenda-driven demand which ignores our primary function and pays no heed to the needs or wants of those patients and families we are caring for.”

“We believe that we haven’t done anything wrong ... We believe we are following on what palliative hospice care truly is,” she said.

The hospice would become exempt from government demands to provide medical death if more than 50 per cent of its funding came from non-government sources. The hospice currently receives \$1.4 million from the government and wants to reduce government funding by \$750,000 in order to fall below the 50-per-cent threshold.

However, the Fraser Health Authority rejected the proposal. A hospice lawyer subsequently wrote to the health authority to repeat the original offer, and Ireland has asked the government to reconsider its position.

“We’re offering to give up \$750,000. That’s how much it means to us to be a true hospice and palliative care facility,” Ireland said.

Reducing government funding would force the hospice to find new funding, she admitted, and many of the hospice's outreach programs would suffer in the interim.

"But we're very happy to propose that to Fraser Health and to the ministry. We hope that they would continue to be a partner with us."

She said the area already has access to assisted suicide. Delta Hospital, which provides assisted suicide, is located just around the corner from the hospice.

"We're not keeping people from accessing euthanasia. You could have it at a hospital, you could have it at home," said Ireland. "There is a finite number of palliative hospice beds in this province and we are trying to protect those."

The federal MP for the riding, Tamara Jansen, defended Delta Hospice, saying in a statement Jan. 15 she is "very disappointed" with the government's threats to shut down the hospice over a debate about assisted suicide.

"The World Health Organization, as well as several major Canadian palliative care organizations, agree that MAiD and palliative care are separate practices ... I'm joining with fellow MPs to call upon Health Minister Adrian Dix and Fraser Health to respect the right of medical professionals to exercise their freedom of conscience."