

Canadian Catholic doctors fight change to World Medical Association euthanasia ban

Catholic doctors from Canada are heading to Iceland in a few weeks to block Canadian Medical Association efforts to change the World Medical Association's code of ethics.

At a meeting of the global doctors' organization in Reykjavik Oct. 3-6, the CMA's vice president for medical professionalism and ethics, Dr. Jeff Blackmer, will team up with the Royal Dutch Medical Association to argue that the WMA's [code of ethics](#) should drop its condemnation of all forms of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide to accommodate doctors in countries where the practice is now legal.

"We are trying to oppose this," said Dr. Tim Lau, president of the [Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians and Societies](#) who practices psychiatry at the Royal Ottawa Hospital and teaches in the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine.



Dr. Tim Lau

Lau, who is a member of both the CMA and the WMA, is part of a group that just had an article on *Euthanasia in Canada* accepted for publication in the World Medical Association Journal. With Dr. Balfour Mount, father of palliative care in Canada, among its authors, the article will stand in contrast to Blackmer's August *WMA Journal* article which outlines the process that led the CMA to drop

its opposition to euthanasia in 2014.

Lau called his group's account of Canada's assisted dying law "a cautionary tale for other countries."

"In the largest jurisdiction in Canada, physicians are obligated to refer. No other country or place has this kind of draconian requirement for participation, especially considering how controversial this 'procedure' is," Lau said in an e-mail.

The WMA's code of ethics has opposed euthanasia since the organization was founded in the wake of the Holocaust in 1947. The global body restated its opposition in the context of physician-assisted suicide in 2005.

"Physician-assisted suicide, like euthanasia, is unethical and must be condemned by the medical profession. Where the assistance of the physician is intentionally and deliberately directed at enabling an individual to end his or her own life, the physician acts unethically.

"However, the right to decline medical treatment is a basic right of the patient and the physician does not act unethically even if respecting such a wish results in the death of the patient," reads the 2005 WMA policy on mercy killing.

In February, the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations has anticipated the Canadian move to neuter the WMA's euthanasia policies. Dr. John Lee, president of the international Catholic doctors' group, wrote to the WMA urging it to hold the line on euthanasia.

Blackmer would not comment to Canadian Catholic News.