

# Addressing the Psychosocial Aspects of MAiD: A Resource for Healthcare Professionals

## Consideration for Psychosocial Needs

The impact of the decision to pursue Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) has a ripple effect that extends beyond the death itself, for the individual, their family, community and healthcare team.

Although every effort is made to alleviate the impact of psychosocial issues in advance, they remain an inherent part of the MAiD journey. These issues can range in severity and in their impact on the facilitation of MAiD, as well as the ability for loved ones to manage following the death. Exploring and mitigating these feelings may enhance the overall experience for individuals who have an experience with MAiD. All members of the healthcare team play a role in providing this support.

Addressing the everyday issues and complex needs of all individuals touched by MAiD is essential. For individuals requesting MAiD, it is important that we approach their journey from a holistic framework. This begins with having a good understanding of their request, an awareness of the support they are presently receiving (formal and informal) and the unique challenges that this process may present for them. Additionally, it is important to consider the dynamics of the support system, cultural, spiritual and faith-based concerns that may arise and access to support for loved ones.

The “Questions to Lead the Conversation” outlined in this document can be used as a guide to facilitate a discussion with patients and their supports about their psychosocial needs as they begin their MAiD journey and can easily be adjusted to best meet the needs of those involved.

We hope that you find this resource helpful, regardless of the field of practice that you are in.

## Patient-Specific Wishes

Patient-specific wishes should be the focus when discussing MAiD. This can include:

- Understanding the reasons why they are seeking MAiD;

- Confirming that they have a good understanding of their options and are connected to appropriate supports for their current needs;
- Identifying things that may provide the individual meaning, comfort and peace prior to the MAiD procedure;
- Seeking rationale for these needs/requests.

## Questions to Lead the Conversation:

- Please tell me why you have chosen to request MAiD?
- Do you feel you have a good understanding of your treatment options and have been given an opportunity to discuss them with your healthcare team?
- Are there things that you feel have not been addressed that require my assistance today?
- What is the best way to support you through this journey?
- Do you have any specific wishes we can support as we work with you to plan your procedure?
- What would be meaningful to you that would bring you peace and comfort on the day of the procedure?

## Support Systems

It is important to clarify the patient's support system during the assessment process and to establish an understanding of the roles and dynamics within this support system that could affect the MAiD experience. Inquire about those who have been involved in the patient's care and those that may be present during the MAiD procedure, making note of the relationship of these individuals to the patient, as well as gauging their level of support for or against the patient's decision to proceed with MAiD. Although many individuals have positive experiences in relation to their family members' and caregivers' support, there are times when they identify people in their lives who have expressed a reluctance to accept their decision. In many cases, since MAiD is a patient-driven process, patients may have an easier time managing their emotions than their family and caregivers.

Even in situations where a patient's supports are involved and accepting of their decision to proceed with MAiD, family members and caregivers may:

- Feel less prepared than the patient and struggle to accept the reality of the situation;
- Have difficulty managing this distress while still trying to remain as involved as possible in providing support/assistance to the patient at end of life;
- Struggle with how to communicate their feelings to others, particularly with those who may not be as understanding or who lack an appreciation for MAiD;

- Have feelings of isolation and frustration.

**Additionally, supports are often placed in a position where they are required to:**

- Teach others about MAiD rather than receiving the immediate support that they seek to address their own needs;
- Provide justification and/or validation of their loved one's rationale for choosing MAiD to others;
- Work through their own grief while managing their regular life;
- "Protect the individual" from additional stress by taking things on by themselves.

## Questions to Lead the Conversation:

- Tell me about who is here with you today and their level of comfort with what we will be discussing today (*as applicable*).
- Is there anyone else who is a main source of support for you? Do you know how they feel about your decision?
- How do you feel it would be best to support these individuals? Do you think they would welcome the support of a spiritual care practitioner?
- Please tell me about anyone in your life that does not support your decision. How does this make you feel?
- Do you have any concerns about how your supports may feel on the day of the procedure?
- Is there anything we should be concerned about for your safety, the safety of your supports and/or the safety of our team?

## Supports for Family/Loved Ones

Support may be limited for those who cannot access private counselling services due to cost, geographic location or fear of stigmatization.

A resource document, "[Support Through the MAiD Journey: Grief and Bereavement Resources](#)", is available through the Champlain Regional MAiD Network. This resource includes information on the services provided in eastern Ontario as well a link to other online resources.

## Culture, Spirituality and Faith

It is important to address the cultural, faith-based, religious or spiritual aspects of a patient's life as part of the MAiD assessment. Some faith-based groups and institutions do not support MAiD, which may cause distress for patients and families.

## Questions to lead the conversation:

- Have you thought about this from your religious, faith or spiritual perspective? Would you like to explore this with a hospital spiritual care practitioner?
- Is there a faith, religious or spiritual concern or aspect that is important in your death?
- Would you like a faith community representative involved during this process or for the procedure?

Should a patient or family wish to involve a spiritual, faith-based or religious group, arrangements can be made to facilitate their request. Patients and their supports may express a reluctance to discuss their situation with their faith leader or request their participation in their MAiD journey because they fear judgment or a negative response from their faith community. Health care Professional should provide support and guidance as appropriate.

When patients request spiritual support during their MAiD journey:

- Facilitate contact with a community faith leader identified by patients;
- Provide space and time for some specific spiritual practices and rituals to take place during or following the MAiD procedure;
- If possible, consult with your Spiritual Care team. If you require guidance, please contact the Champlain Regional MAiD Network.

## Transfers Out of Faith-Based Institutions

Transfer from faith-based institutions at the end of life can be stressful for patients, families and the health care providers. If a transfer is required, it is imperative to work closely with the sending facility in advance of the procedure to clarify roles and responsibilities during the process. The goal is to provide a seamless approach to arranging transportation and ensuring comfort of the patient and family during the transfer.

## Other Things to Consider

### Questions to Lead the Conversation:

- Have you made any funeral arrangements or are you considering making any funeral arrangements prior to the procedure? Who will be making the arrangements? Where have these arrangements been made?
- Do you have a life insurance policy? Have you provided your supports with the policy number and/or the contact information for the life insurance agent? Who will be completing the necessary forms after the procedure?

- Do you have a will? Have you provided your supports with a copy and/or do your supports know where a copy can be located? Can you tell me about any specific requests outlined in your will that we should be aware of?
- How do you plan to arrive on the day of the procedure?
- Are there any outstanding tasks/items that you would like support in managing and/or completing prior to the procedure?

## For More Information

For more information about MAiD, contact The Champlain Regional MAiD Network:  
[maid@toh.ca](mailto:maid@toh.ca)

This booklet gives you common facts, advice and tips. Some of it may not apply to you. Please talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care team member to see if this information will work for you. They can also answer your questions and concerns.

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