

An Open Letter to the House of Lords from a Canadian Physician: Assisted Dying Destroys Hope

Assisted dying destroys hope and leads people to giving up on life.

MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA, October 18, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- This is an open letter to the House of Lords from Dr. Paul Saba, a Canadian family physician and author of "Made to Live" madetolive.com:

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Physicians are not God. When doctors give a patient a diagnosis, we can be wrong. In fact, errors in diagnosis for severe, life-threatening conditions may be as high as twenty percent.”

Dr. Paul Saba

“As the United Kingdom House of Lords debates the legalization of assisted dying, as a family physician from Montreal, Canada, I want to warn the British not to go down this wrong and dangerous road.

When Canada legalized assisted dying in 2016, it was supposed to be for only a “few” terminal illness patients with only days to live. At the end of 2020, over 21,500 Canadians had their lives ended by physician assisted dying. Since March of this year, the law has been further

expanded to those with disabilities with years to live and in less than two years those with mental illness will be eligible for assisted dying.

As a doctor, I know just how dangerous it is when killing patients becomes part of the healthcare system. Physicians are not God. When doctors give a patient a diagnosis, we can be wrong. In fact, errors in diagnosis for severe, life-threatening conditions may be as high as twenty percent.

Recently, my patient Jim (pseudonym) came to me with a cough thinking he had a cold. I ordered a chest x-ray. According to the radiologist’s report of the chest film, Jim appeared to have lung cancer. I sat down with Jim and said: “We need to do a scan right away. We need to get you to see a specialist. We need to do a bronchoscopy....”

Jim responded: “Dr. Saba, I know you’re against assisted suicide, but you know what? I don’t necessarily agree with you. If I’m going to die, if my time is up...” I replied, “No, no. You have to go through the process because this is only a preliminary diagnosis. Even if it is lung cancer, it is

treatable today. There are new treatments. It may not even be lung cancer.” I spoke to the radiologist who performed the lung scan, who said, “We’re not sure what it is. It appears to be lung cancer but it may be a lymphoma, which would be highly treatable.”

Jim is an intelligent, well-informed man, an engineer, who thought he had a cold, then was told he might have cancer. He could have resigned himself to a medically assisted death before he even knew what we were dealing with, since Canada’s law allows a person to not undergo all investigations necessary to confirm the diagnosis. He could have given up hope while the situation was still filled with hope. The power to move people to give up is one of the dangerous and misleading aspects of medically assisted dying. However, I was able to get his attention and persuade him that the situation was hopeful and that he should get more tests and undergo treatment. In the end, he called me in the summer of 2019 to thank me because there was no

further evidence of disease which is still the case today. He had finally been diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, which is a condition that is highly curable with proper medical treatment.



A [recent Canadian study](#) found that close to a third of patients with a diagnosis of “lung cancer” who died by assisted suicide did not have a biopsy-proven diagnosis of lung cancer. Moreover, they were less likely to consult with radiation or medical oncologist and less likely to undergo effective treatments. This is what happens when the door is opened to assisted dying. Jim could have been another assisted dying fatality. I am a doctor, who believes medicine must be grounded in solid science, in what research and experience teach us about how the body works and heals.

However, hope is one of the most powerful forces for good medical care. When I say hope is a powerful force for health, I mean that hope counsels us to patience, to seeing processes through, and to regarding every step as part of the great gift of being made for life. Assisted dying destroys that hope and leads people to giving up on life.”

END

Dr. Paul Saba is currently a family physician who practices in Montreal. He is co-founder of Physicians for Social Justice <https://coalitionmd.ca/> and is the author of the book entitled “Made to Live.”

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