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Medical Assistance in Dying

On June 17th, the House of Commons passed legislation permitting Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). While this action is more commonly referred to as Physician Assisted Death, Nurse Practitioners (NP) are also accounted for as prescribers in the legislation, thus the use of the broader term.

This matter has already become a topic at PAC meetings and we have begun to field questions at GeriatRx as well. All three of our governing colleges (CNO, OCP and CPSO) have produced guidance documents and I will refer to them in this article.

As we have heard in the news, to qualify for MAiD, an individual must suffer from a grievous illness for which there is no remedy. They must be in an advanced state of decline and enduring intolerable suffering. There is more detail in the wording of the guidance documents, but if there is any question of qualification, a lawyer should

be consulted. An important point is that any resident requesting MAiD must be cognitive and must state their desire for this process in writing. If they are unable to sign and date such a request, they may appoint someone to do so, on their behalf. That individual cannot knowingly benefit in any material way from the individual's death. A ten day period must pass, though this may be excused in exceptional cases, before the MAiD order is implemented. The patient must be given an opportunity to withdraw their request immediately before MAiD is initiated or before the MAiD prescription is written.

Protection for the physician/NP is also built into the process. A second, independent physician/NP must assess the patient and concur that they meet the legislated criteria for MAiD. If so, an order can be written and the pharmacy can proceed in ordering supplies. The prescription must indicate that the medications are to be used for MAiD, and the pharmacist must assure him/herself that the prescriber has followed all the required steps.

The medications used for MAiD are largely or entirely administered via the i.v. route. They may include benzodiazepines, local and general anesthetics and neuromuscular blocking agents

which halt respiration. Few facilities have policies and procedures in place for administration of these medications. The involvement of physicians or NPs without facility privileges is another complicating factor. As such, MAiD may be performed in hospitals in some cases. I believe this will change, in time, as the resident's home is likely the most comforting place for this compassionate act to take place.

Reconciliation Indication

The Resident Assessment Instrument (RAI) requires an indication for each of a resident's listed medications. In most cases, this is not provided to GeriatRx on the initial prescription.

While some medications are used for only one purpose, many have multiple approved uses and a number may be used for "off-label" conditions. As a result, we often cannot determine the indication unless it is provided to us. Unfortunately, it is usually omitted from new orders.

To help incorporate this into the record, we have added an "Indication for Use" column to our Medication Reconciliation form. The form can be found in the secure area of our website. Please include the indication, based on hospital discharge or other data provided upon admission.

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