REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE
“How will I die?”

by Kalliopi (Kalli) Stilos

Every illness brings some level of suffering. There comes a time in one’s disease trajectory where that suffering may become too great to bear. Canada made medical assistance in dying (MAiD) legal in June 2016. Yet, many patients I encounter experience stigma when they lean towards that option, either because of religious beliefs or family members’ opinions. I often hear patients tell me the thought of a prolonged end-of-life experience, full of suffering, is one that they want to spare their loved ones from. Making decisions about end of life is so personal and overwhelming when they come all at once.

Watching patients vacillate through the process can be thought-provoking for the healthcare provider involved. I wrote the poem after witnessing a patient request MAiD and her two daughters expressing opposing views on the medical intervention. She was approved for the medical intervention, but then decided to wait a little longer before proceeding. She carried on with palliative care for her symptom issues and a few months later she proceeded with MAiD. It took her opposing daughter time to get on board with MAiD. Her final moments were spent with her two daughters holding hands and embracing each other, all while surrounded by a room full of her favourite flowers.

How will I die?
I’ve seen so much death,
I wonder how I will die.
Will it be Cancer, COPD, ALS, or a quick MI?
How frightening each one sounds.
I’ve seen them all and yet I can’t decide.
Each one with the same bleak outcome.
Now, Canadians have been given a choice.
MAiD.
Medical Assistance in Dying.
Giving you control, relief and a dignified way to die, if you qualify.
A process that’s swift and painless, that whisks away the fear of a prolonged death.
How reassuring it sounds.
Will I exercise that right when my time comes?
Till then, I live with the unknown.

AUTHOR NOTE
Kalliopi (Kalli) Stilos, RN, MScN, CHPCN(C), Advance Practice Nurse for the Palliative Care Consult Team, Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, 2075 Bayview Avenue, Room H-337, Clinical Faculty, University of Toronto’s Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing
Kalli.stilos@sunnybrook.ca