

Position Statement

Ontario is a good place to live ...but, is it a good place to die?

“People should be able to expect and achieve a decent or good death—one that is free from avoidable distress and suffering for patients, families, and caregivers; in general accord with patients’ and families’ wishes; and reasonably consistent with clinical, cultural and ethical standards” (adapted from Institute of Medicine, *Approaching Death: Improving Care at the End-of-Life.....*)

OPCA Position

Ontarians who are living with terminal illness are some of society's most vulnerable. All Ontarians have the right to die with dignity, to have access to physical, psychological, bereavement and spiritual care, and to be granted the respect consistent with other phases of life.

People in these circumstances deserve care that aims to relieve their suffering and improve the quality of their living and dying by:

1. Offering enough service provision to enable people to live in the setting of their choice until they die.
2. Providing access to expert hospice palliative care services that can address disease related pain and symptoms.
3. Supporting family care providers who are supporting their loved ones.
4. Ensuring care is coordinated by interdisciplinary teams.
5. Ensuring that the public and health care providers are aware, informed and educated about what hospice palliative care is and how it can be accessed where they live and work.

Background

OPCA works to raise awareness of and facilitate informed discussion on issues related to hospice palliative/end-of-life (EOL) care. OPCA also advocates for the expansion of hospice palliative/end-of-life care in Ontario and seeks to contribute to government policy development and funding. To do this requires understanding and recognizing the number of complex issues occurring in and observed by all sectors and disciplines of health care providers.

In July 2007, the OPCA completed a comprehensive independent survey of its full membership and other hospice palliative care stakeholder individuals across Ontario. The purpose of the survey was to determine the ‘most’ important or ‘top of mind’ issues as determined from the perspective of these providers.

In spite of significant recent government initiatives aimed at improving the care and support of people living with progressive life-limiting illness in Ontario, the above-mentioned survey revealed that there continues to be a number of inadequacies and inequities. Survey respondents identified in order of expressed importance that currently the five most concerning issues are:

1. Equitable access to hospice palliative care for all Ontarians who are living with progressive life-limiting illness.
2. Access to adequate expert consultative pain and symptom management.
3. Family and family caregiver support is crucial to supporting client choices for hospice palliative/EOL care.
4. A coordinated, interdisciplinary model of care is key to delivering excellent hospice palliative/EOL care.
5. Education and training of formal and informal care providers is essential to sustaining that excellence.