

An examination of the *Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec* euthanasia poll

Updated October 29, 2009

The *Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec* released their euthanasia survey on October 13, 2009. It reported that 76 per cent of specialists were in favour of passing a bill like C-384 that would make euthanasia legal and was used as evidence that doctors in Quebec fully support C-384.

The survey is flawed for two main reasons:

- It had a rate of return of only 23 per cent (2,025 of 8,717 active medical specialists who are members of the federation answered the survey). [1]
- Palliative care consultants were not surveyed because a majority of medical specialists in Quebec do not dedicate a significant amount of their practice time to palliative care. [2] Yet such consultants would be best positioned to comment on euthanasia since they are most familiar with the care, needs and desires of dying patients.

The *Fédération* states that:

- 84 per cent of medical specialists are prepared to hold a debate on euthanasia. [3]
- 76 per cent of specialists would support the passage of a Bill legalizing euthanasia by the House of Commons [4]

This gives the impression that the *Fédération* can make definitive statements on behalf of their membership based on this survey. Yet, calculations based on the 23 per cent response rate indicate roughly 17 to 19 per cent support these two statements. Other findings of the survey show just the opposite:

- “Even though 54 per cent of them (specialists) were certainly or probably favourable to euthanasia within a clearly defined legal framework, 20 per cent of them indicated that they would definitely not use it.” [5]
- “... opinions were sharply divided when the question was asked whether palliative sedation can be likened to a form of euthanasia, with 48 per cent answering ‘Yes’ and 46 per cent answering ‘No’”. [6] The federation’s members who responded are split as to what palliative sedation is.

The majority of *Fédération* members do not understand palliative sedation because they have not been trained as palliative care consultants. [7] The experts in death and dying are not part of the specialist’s federation, but of the federation of general practitioners (FMOQ).

The low response rate and the lack of inclusion of palliative consultants mean that this survey does not accurately represent Quebec doctors. In order to ascertain medical opinions on Bill C-384 in Quebec, another survey designed to overcome these obstacles needs to be conducted.

Endnotes

- [1] Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec. (September 13, 2009). Euthanasia: The Key Points of the FMSQ Survey, press release. Retrieved October 21, 2009 from <http://www.fmsq.org/e/centredepresse/communiqués/coms/20091013.html>
- [2] Personal communication with Dr. Bernard Lapointe, October 28, 2009
- [3] Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec. Euthanasia : Key Points.
- [4] *Ibid.*
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] *Ibid.*
- [7] Personal communication with Dr. Bernard Lapointe, October 28, 2009