

# Canada must respect physician objectors who do not wish to refer patients for assisted death

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Assisted dying may become legal in Canada on Feb. 6, 2016, and we must respect physicians' conscientious objections to assisted dying if it is against their principles.

Dr. John Fletcher, Editor-in-Chief of *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*) argues that just as we allow physicians in Canada to opt out of referring [pregnant women](#) for abortion, so too must we allow a similar option in the case of referrals for assisted death.

"Doctors have no business denying [patients](#) their newly recognized right, no matter how strongly they may feel," states Dr. Fletcher. "But where does this leave physicians who, for whatever reason, do not wish to be involved with helping their patients to gain access to medical aid in dying? Those who would refuse, not only to offer medical aid in dying themselves, but also to refer a patient to another doctor for such a service, argue that referral would make them guilty by association of an act that they see as wrong."

The next step in the road to assisted dying is for the country's [medical profession](#) to create a system that will allow patients to receive the medical support to die if they wish while respecting physicians who cannot provide referrals because of their beliefs.

"Simply saying that doctors may give medical aid in dying or should

refer to someone who will is not adequate, because many [doctors](#) will be reluctant, leaving vulnerable patients and their caregivers fighting their own doctor for their rights," states Dr. Fletcher.

This service should be offered directly to patients, and their [physicians](#) should be required to inform them of the service.

**More information:** *Canadian Medical Association Journal*,  
[www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.151238](http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.151238)

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