

February 6, 2008

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Life or Death: Who decides?

Panel of experts discusses treatment decisions at the end of life

MEDIA AVAILABILITY: 1 PM (FEB. 7) 3RD FL., FANTASYLAND HOTEL
(in advance of the presentations and panel from 1:30 – 4:30 pm.)

Edmonton – Controversies around end of life care, particularly in cases of alleged “futile” treatment, have become increasingly common. In Canada, there is the recent case of Samuel Golubchuk. While doctors believe the 84-year-old should be taken off life support because his vegetative condition will never improve, the Winnipeg man’s Orthodox Jewish family is in court trying to keep their father alive. The family argues their religious beliefs don’t allow any action that would hasten death.

An Angus Reid poll released last December shows nearly seven in 10 Canadians think family members—not doctors or judges—should decide when to remove a vegetative patient from life support. Only 2% of the more than 1,000 people polled between Dec. 3 and 4 think the courts should decide and 15% believe doctors should make the call.

On February 7, as part of the 22nd annual People and Progress conference, a panel of experts gathers to explore what role personal values, ethics and medical judgements play in making treatment decisions for the dying. Dr. Colin Powell, a geriatrician from the University of Calgary, will focus on dementia-friendly terminal care. Father Mark Miller, a medical ethicist from Saskatoon, discusses the ethical principles for treatment at the end of life. And Al-Noor Nenshi Nathoo, Executive Director of the Provincial Health Ethics Network of Alberta, explores common misconceptions and confusion surrounding the notion of so-called “futile care.”

The People & Progress Conference, the longest-running continuing care conference in Canada, enables elder care providers to share knowledge and advances in continuing (long-term) care. This year’s theme, “Continuing Care: Coming of Age,” explores the effects of the upcoming demographic shift in society; managing chronic illness and complex care needs that accompany an extended life span; how to meet future expectations with limited resources and ethical issue in continuing care. As well, speakers will offer strategies for health care workers to cope with the anticipated challenges.

Presented by the CapitalCare Foundation, the 22nd annual People & Progress Conference runs Feb. 7 & 8 at the Fantasyland Hotel. The conference begins with a keynote address by Jody Urquhart, author of the syndicated column “Joy of Work.” Her presentation, Daring to be Caring, shows healthcare leaders how to inspire a spirited and resilient workforce (8:30 am-9:45 am)

Information about the conference is available at www.capitalcare.net (click on “Conferences”).

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To schedule an interview, please contact:

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CapitalCare is the largest public continuing care organization in Canada. Caring for people in Edmonton and area since 1964, our 2,800 staff provide care and services for 1,400 elderly and disabled adults living in 11 centres and over 300 clients living in the community. CapitalCare is a wholly owned subsidiary of Capital Health.