

Commission special sur la question de mourir dans la dignité
Brief on General Consultation Dying with Dignity
Attn: Anik Laplante

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My mother was diagnosed with inoperable non small cell stage 3 lung cancer and whose treatment was complicated by having multiple sclerosis, diabetes and arthritis. She was a real fighter, though, and wouldn't believe she was dying, not until the very end, many chemo & radiation treatments and numerous hospital stays later. A year ago May, at the age of 67, and after courageously battling her cancer for over 4 years, she was readmitted to the hospital yet again, with a collapsed lung and was "drowning", her biggest fear. The cancer had spread, she wasn't eating any more so was wasting away; she was dying and in chronic pain and slowly suffocating. She was not getting any better, and would not be getting any better, only worse. There was nothing more the doctors could do except try to keep her comfortable. After numerous family meetings over a period of several days with her and her palliative care doctors at the hospital, she repeatedly stated to the doctors and to all of us that she finally had had enough, she was done fighting; she just wanted to go to sleep and never wake up; to die quickly and peacefully. Myself and family members took turns staying by her bedside for over 3 days after her decision was made to have palliative sedation, while slowly dehydrating to death. I hope that she didn't suffer. I kept moisturizing her feet, face and tongue, which was hard and dried like sandpaper near the end. Her skin became paper thin on her hands and my dad rubbed some off with his thumb by accident when he was holding her hand. He was horrified and cried. It was awful seeing her die like this. Again, I hope she really was well sedated and didn't suffer, on a conscious or unconscious level. When a pet reaches this stage, we can have them euthanized. After seeing my mom slowly dehydrate and starve to death, if ever I am found in the same situation, I would want to be euthanized. I know of some people who "lived" like this for a week or more. My uncle lived for 11 days like this. Why do we have to watch our loved ones slowly die like this? Is this really humane? Where is the dignity? I miss my mother every day, but I still think of her poor hand, mouth and tongue often, too. There must be a better way to live, and then to die, with dignity.

Dianne Laheurte