



## MAiD gathering to take place on Thursday

BY DR. KATHY KORTES-MILLER

THE landscape of dying and death in Canada has changed. It is almost impossible to have essential conversations about end of life issues without including medical assistance in dying (MAiD).

On Feb. 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada sent down a decision regarding Carter v. Canada, legalizing physician-assisted death.

This landmark decision concluded that such a prohibition was against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The decision recognized that a majority of Canadians express a strong desire for choice and autonomy over the way they die.

Canadians over the age of 18 have the right to request MAiD, but not everyone who requests MAiD will receive it. There are specific eligibility criteria that an individual needs to meet to access MAiD alongside safeguards that must be satisfied by the healthcare providers assessing and providing MAiD.

According to the fourth annual report on Medical Assistance in Dying provided by the Government of Canada, there were 13,241 MAiD provisions completed across our country in 2022. This number accounts for just over four per cent of all the deaths in Canada. There has been a 31.2 per cent increase in the number of deaths using MAiD in Canada since 2021.

Reasons someone might request MAiD are not that different from why many of us are fearful of dying and death. Some request MAiD because they want to maintain a sense of control and autonomy. Others may find the suffering they are experiencing is too great and want an end to it. Still others view their dying as a burden on their families and want it to end. For some, it may be all these reasons and more.

Canadians have asked for choice at the end of life and now MAiD is an option. It is important that we do not allow this op-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dr. Kathy Kortés-Miller will be part of a panel discussion on medical assistance in dying (MAiD) on Thursday at the Courthouse Hotel at 5:30 p.m.

### MAKING MOMENTS MATTER



tion to move us away from the work we approach human suffering and systems of care.

It is essential for our society to continue to discuss, examine and improve how we care for people at the end of their lives. The way we treat our most vulnerable members of society says a lot about what we value. Options at the end of life that include access to palliative and end-of-life care for all Canadians regardless of geography or diagnosis, will help ensure that people die a death that is congruent with their values.

Perhaps only some Canadians will ultimately access MAiD, but many of us will be thankful that we live in a society where it is an option.

It is important that, along with conversations with our family, friends and healthcare providers, we continue to tell our legislators and government leaders that how we die matters. It is up to us, while we are healthy, to make these expectations known, as those who are dying are often too ill to speak up and the dead no longer complain.

We need to be part of a caring, compassionate community,

that values all stages of life and living, including our dying and deaths.

If the legalization of MAiD has impacted you or someone you care about, or if you have questions about the legislation, come join members of our Thunder Bay Community on Thursday for a Conversation about MAiD.

This event is part of Hospice Northwest Services Dialogues series and is hosted in partnership with the Centre for Education and Research on Aging and Health.

We will be gathering at 5:30 p.m. at the Courthouse Hotel for dinner and a panel discussion that includes a MAiD provider, MAiD coordinator and a family member of someone who accessed MAiD.

Our intention is to provide opportunity for important, respectful conversations that will help us to consider dying as part of our life legacy rather than just the end of it. Let's get the conversations happening.

If you would like to join us for this event, please call 807-626-5573 to register. Space is limited and registration will be closed when we reach room capacity.

*This monthly column from Hospice Northwest examines various aspects of palliative support and bereavement services. It appears on the Healthstyle page of The Chronicle-Journal on the first Tuesday of each month. Call Hospice Northwest at 626-5570 for more information.*

## Barbers being trained to spot troubled minds

BY W. GIFFORD-JONES AND DIANA GIFFORD-JONES

IS NECESSITY or curiosity the mother of innovation? Sometimes good old common sense is the driving factor, and there will be no Nobel prize for seeing the obvious. That, however, is what's behind a new development in barber shops and hair salons.

What's the buzz? It's that barbers and hairdressers are being trained to detect mental health problems among the clients sitting in their chairs. It makes perfect sense. People regularly confide in their trusted barber or hairdresser the most personal details of their lives. And these chats are enough to detect signs of troubled mental health. With a small amount of training, hair stylists can help direct their customers to sources of support.

Using barbers and hairdressers as a portal to mental health assistance appears to be a growing trend in several countries including the U.K., U.S., and Canada. As Daniel Reale-Chin recently reported in The Globe and Mail, groups like Black Mental Health Canada (BMHC) are training barbers to become first responders to members of their communities. BMHC deserves credit for applying a little common sense, something as uncommon these days as the dodo bird.

Past Gifford-Jones columns have lauded taxicab drivers for having more old-fashioned horse sense than some doctors. Taxicab drivers and barbers are often wise philosophers and astute observers. They usually talk about and pass along sound opinions on many current affairs. Importantly, they are experienced in listening. There's no doubt they can be effective in detecting early symptoms of stress, unusual behaviour, and mental anguish among their customers.

One of the great problems of mental illness is the stigma and fear of others knowing that you're suffering from this problem. It will always be the stumbling block to early diagnosis. But being in a barber's chair or sitting in a hairdressing salon is the right atmosphere to allow those with mental difficulties to unwind and inform their barber, or hairdresser, that something is disturbing their well being.

Moreover, many people build a trusted relationship with their



THE DOCTOR GAME

hair stylist. You can talk about what's eating you day after day without the whole world knowing. The very fact that your normally polished exterior is removed in the salon mirror while having your hair done may facilitate the sense of a reality check. The trusted barber offers a private, safe place to hint that you're not as calm and collected on the outside as it appears when the polish is on.

Alice Wiafe is a registered psychotherapist and president of BMHC. The aim of this charity is to improve mental health within the Black community. As reported by Real-Chin, she says that the number of Black people suffering from mental health challenges is even higher than found in surveys like the one conducted by Statistics Canada, in which 27.9 per cent of Black visible-minority respondents self-reported fair or poor mental health compared with 22.9 per cent of white respondents. Wiafe notes, Black people need a little prodding to tell the truth about their mental health.

Taking the initiative to see a mental health specialist, or finding such services, can be a real roadblock. So training barbers, hairdressers, taxicab drivers, and even bartenders to help address this problem is an innovative move. BMHC trains barbers and hairdressers to tread carefully on this matter. They should only discuss mental health if they sense clients want to discuss what troubles them.

Now the key is to make sure sufficient services are available to handle the certain uptick in demand and referrals.

*The Doctor Game runs each Tuesday in The Chronicle-Journal. Dr. Ken Walker (aka W. Gifford-Jones) has a private practice in Toronto. After more than four decades the tradition continues in a father-daughter collaboration. Please send comments to info@docgiff.com or visit docgiff.com.*

## Psychedelic industry picking up steam in pharma economics

BY MATTHEW PERRONE THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Money is pouring into the fledgling psychedelic medicine industry, with dozens of startup companies vying to be among the first to sell mind-expanding drugs for depression, addiction and other mental health conditions.

While psychedelics are still illegal under federal law, companies are jostling to try and patent key ingredients found in magic mushrooms, ayahuasca and other substances that have been used underground for decades or — in some cases — for millennia by Indigenous cultures.

Wall Street's sudden exuberance for hallucinogens has rankled longtime advocates and philanthropists, who dreamed of making low-cost psychedelics widely available for mental health and personal growth. Instead, many now see a very dif-

ferent future for drugs like psilocybin and LSD: as expensive, specialty medications controlled by a handful of biotech companies.

"It's disappointing," said Carey Turnbull, an investor and philanthropist who sits on the board of several psychedelic nonprofits.

"All the air is getting sucked out of the room by these for-profit companies who say, 'Wow, this stuff is awesome, if I could patent it I'd make a fortune.'"

Since 2010, Turnbull and his wife have donated millions to fund psychedelic research at New York University, Yale and other top academic centres.

Promising results from those studies have sparked a wave of popular interest in psychedelics, amplified by books, documentaries and articles touting their potential to reshape care for mental illness, trauma and end-of-life care.

But in recent years, Turnbull has pivoted to challenging what he and other advocates consider frivolous patents filed by companies entering the field.

Most psychedelic startups are backed by venture capitalists or tech investors looking for the next industry "disruptor." Behind one of the biggest companies, Atai Life Sciences, is PayPal billionaire Peter Thiel, whose enthusiasm for psychedelics is shared by many in Silicon Valley.

About 50 such companies now trade on public stock exchanges, including developers of psychedelic drugs, retreats and training programs.

Some analysts project the industry could grow to over \$10 billion within the decade.

But recently investors have pulled back, amid reminders of the stark challenges of converting illegal drugs into money-making medicines.

Atai laid off 30 per cent of its staff last March after its depression treatment failed in a key study.

Stocks are down 80 per cent to 90 per cent from their highs across the industry with several smaller companies restructuring or declaring bankruptcy.

"They're in this hype cycle, but then the reality of running a biotech company catches up with you," said Chris Yetter of Dumont Global, which trades in cannabis and psychedelic companies.

"You do drug trials and some of them succeed and some fail and every quarter your cash drains away."

The cash crunch recently forced fundamental changes at the field's leading nonprofit, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.

For more than 30 years, MAPS' efforts have been funded almost entirely by donations

from wealthy individuals and foundations — including Republican political donor Rebekah Mercer and the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation, created by the hedge fund manager and New York Mets owner with his wife.

The group's pharmaceutical arm, the MAPS Public Benefit Corp., is expected to win U.S. approval this year for the first psychedelic medicine accepted for review by the Food and Drug Administration: MDMA, or ecstasy, to help treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

But as investment opportunities have multiplied, charitable donations have dried up. The group was recently forced to take on private investors to continue funding the drug company, which changed its name to Lykos Therapeutics.

"We're a victim of our own success," said MAPS founder Rick Doblin.

**Call us to buy tickets:**  
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