

NDP's Olivia Chow among speakers at Regina conference on palliative care

BY PAMELA COWAN, LEADER-POST APRIL 10, 2013



Olivia Chow, NDP Member of Parliament.

Photograph by: Troy Fleece , Regina Leader-Post files

It's time to start talking openly about death and end-of-life care.

"We're pretty much a death-defying culture - we don't want to talk about death - and even when it's happening, we resist talking about death," said Sandra Kary, a board member of the Saskatchewan Hospice Palliative Care Association. "Most of our medical community is trained to be curative, not dealing with issues of death and dying, but it's not something that we can ignore anymore. It never has been, but we need to really champion it and bring it into the light."

The goal of palliative care is to ensure a quality and comfortable death that is dignified.

MP Olivia Chow and internationally renowned palliative care physician, Dr. Ira Byock, will be among the speakers at Out of the Shadows: Extending the Boundaries of Hospice Palliative Care - a conference to be held at the Delta Hotel, Trade and Convention Centre on June 13 and 14.

The conference is to raise awareness about the needs of under-served populations requiring hospice palliative care, educate professional and family caregivers about palliative care and provide a networking opportunity for leaders, clinicians, volunteers and the public.

Chow will share her experience of caregiving for her late husband, Jack Layton, and her bereavement journey.

"She has a real strong voice about what her wishes for hospice palliative care would be, and so it just brings to the table that this is something that we all need to start talking about and planning for and inviting governments at all levels to bring some real funding and some real dollars to this," Kary said. "We're hoping that she is very inspiring and encouraging with a message that will inspire others to make that same ask of their governments as well."

Byock's keynote speech will be Physician-Assisted Suicide: Why both sides are wrong. Kary expects the controversial topic will generate much interest because there are some people committed to both sides of the debate.

"Our goal isn't to pick one side or the other because controversial debates are just that," Kary said.

"We want to hear what he has to say about maybe debunking some of the myths on both sides and coming out with a better understanding of what's happening with end-of-life issues and what circles around the debate with physician-assisted suicides. These aren't easy answers. They're not cut and dried. They're grey so being the leading expert, we're looking forward to hearing what he has to say on that."

Kary expects the event will draw more than 300 delegates, which is why the conference is held in larger centres such as Saskatoon and Regina.

"We do want to reach out into our smaller communities as well and so we're working toward having some educational and fundraising events in the smaller communities to really promote and talk about what's happening in hospice palliative care," Kary said.

For more information, go to www.saskpalliativecare.org and click on the conference link.

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