

**Logline A (90 characters)**

Canadian doctors and patients struggle to identify the limits of the newly granted right to die.

**Logline B (120 characters)**

Canadian doctors and patients navigate the newly granted right to die under a broad Supreme Court decision – the first of its kind outside Europe.

**Synopsis – Short (250 words)**

*Road to Mercy* documents Canada’s journey into the furthest ethical frontier – a place where doctors are allowed to take a life and where society must decide on the circumstances under which they can. Through the stories of patients who seek medically assisted death and the committed physicians who agree to help them, the original one-hour documentary chronicles Canada’s first legal doctor-assisted deaths and peers into the extreme boundaries of this practice. Following stories in Canada and in Belgium, where assisted suicide has been legal for more than a decade, *Road to Mercy* reveals the moral and ethical quandaries at the heart of medical aid in dying.

After years of debate and lawsuits, medically assisted death is finally legal in Canada, following a decision by the Supreme Court to decriminalize it on February 6, 2015. This landmark ruling allows a doctor to help end their patient’s life when “consenting adults determine they cannot tolerate the physical or psychological suffering brought on by a severe, incurable illness, disease or disability.” The Supreme Court allowed the federal government 12 months, and then a four-month extension, to enact new legislation that upholds these fundamental human rights and amends the Criminal Code. *Road to Mercy* is a window on this historical period, between February 2015 and June 2016 – after the Supreme Court ruling and before Canada’s first law on medical assistance in dying (MAID).

**Synopsis – Long (800 words)**

*Road To Mercy* follows doctors and their patients as they struggle to identify the limits of the newly granted right to die. In Belgium, we meet bold physicians who are testing those limits – going beyond terminal illness to provide an assisted death for suffering psychiatric patients, a scenario that is legal both in Belgium and under Canada’s recent Supreme Court Carter ruling.

**Danielle Lacroix** is a 61-year-old mother with liver cancer whose doctor recently told her she has three months left to live, is now under the care of palliative doctor Dr. Louis Roy. Dr. Roy is one of the few palliative doctors in Canada who has agreed to provide MAID. It’s a service Danielle is certain she wants, when the time comes.

**Dr. Louis Roy** practices at L’Hôpital de L’Enfant Jésus in Quebec City. He used to be opposed to MAID, but now sees it as something important he can offer his sickest patients as part of a merciful progression to death.

In Quebec, MAID has become legal two months before anywhere else in the country, because the province pre-empted the Supreme Court by passing end-of-life-care legislation in 2014, which came into effect December 18, 2015. Unlike the unanimous and broad Supreme Court decision, under Quebec law only terminal patients are eligible. Quebec patients wanting MAID must have an incurable terminal illness and be in “an advanced state of irreversible decline in capacities.”

In Belgium, **Amy De Schutter** is a 29-year-old professional woman who has been losing her battle with mental illness for more than half her life. After six diagnoses and years of treatment, nothing has helped her psychological pain. She often tries to relieve her suffering through self-harm, cutting. She has attempted suicide more than 10 times. Amy’s remissions are short and make her relapses even more difficult to navigate. She tells her psychiatrist she has lost the will to fight.

**Dr. Lieve Thienpont** is the psychiatrist overseeing Amy’s euthanasia request, as she meets with a series of mental health professionals in the lengthy approval process to die. Dr. Thienpont will not give her approval to Amy until she is satisfied they have exhausted all treatment options. In the end Amy will also need the approval of another doctor, before she will have access to a physician-assisted death. Having attempted suicide 10 times already, the danger of another suicide attempt is always present.

***Road to Mercy*** follows Amy’s journey as she tries to decide if her life is worth living. The camera records her discussions with Dr. Thienpont and her mother as they probe her options: the possibility of life with incurable suffering or death of her own choosing.

Belgium is a country that began its euthanasia history with a law that closely resembles Canada’s Supreme Court Carter decision. Since 2002, the number of cases per year in Belgium has grown quickly in both size and scope – up to five euthanasia deaths per day now, and a new legislative amendment that extends the practice to terminally ill children.

**John Tuckwell** of Edmonton, Alberta was diagnosed with ALS in 2012, and has been rapidly deteriorating over the last few months. John plans on a doctor-assisted death when his quality of life has deteriorated to a state where he no longer enjoys living – something he finds difficult to pinpoint.

As his disease has progressed John’s goal posts have moved. He’s learned to enjoy life without being able to taste food or talk. He’s learned other ways to communicate and adapted to being dependent on others.

John’s neurologist at the ALS clinic in Edmonton, Dr. Wendy Johnston, respects his desire for physician-assisted death (PAD), but feels she can’t personally offer it. She struggles to balance her professional duty to her patients and her medical code of

ethics. The rate of PAD requests among ALS patients is high, but through years of practise Dr. Johnston knows that patients often don't follow through with MAID.

One of the few people in Canada to publicize his pursuit of a physician-assisted death, John does so because he wants others to know it's now a choice for Canadians. Despite his exchanges with Dr. Johnston, he's certain he will choose a physician-assisted death when he's ready.

***Road to Mercy*** documents our country as it enters the farthest ethical frontier – a place where doctors are allowed to take a life and where we as a country must decide on the circumstances under which they can.