



HER LAST PROJECT

A film by ROSVITA DRANSFELD

herlastproject.ca



PRESS KIT



Presented by
Canadian Blood Services
and
Nova Scotia Health Authority – Legacy of Life

Directed by
Rosvita Dransfeld

Executive Producers:
Amber Appleby and Rosvita Dransfeld
Director of Cinematography: Marcia Conolly
Editor: Brenda Tarning | Music: APM
Sound Design: Philip Dransfeld
Production Designer: Adrian De La Pena
Project Lead: Ken Lotherington

Learn more at
herlastproject.ca



Synopsis

Her Last Project is the extraordinary story of Dr. Shelly Sarwal, a physician from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Diagnosed with Multiple System Atrophy (MSA), an incurable disease, Shelly chose to undergo the recently legalized Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) procedure and become an organ donor. As the first person in Nova Scotia to undergo this complicated medical journey, she dedicated the short time she had left on this earth to educate health professionals and the general public about being in control of your death and creating a meaningful legacy through organ donation.

Cameras documented the process, from meeting with doctors and having her organs assessed to celebrating her life with loved ones. After saying goodbye to her closest friends with toast and tea, she died peacefully, with her husband at her side. Shelly's organ donation saved three lives and she donated her brain to research.

It was Shelly's wish to share her experience as a way to educate the public and the medical community about organ and tissue donation after MAID. Through this film and other medical curriculum and professional training, the producers are helping to fulfil Shelly's wish.

Her Last Project is directed by Rosvita Dransfeld and produced by Canadian Blood Services, in partnership with Legacy of Life at the Nova Scotia Health Authority.



Born in Halifax, Dr. Shelly Sarwal was a graduate of Dalhousie Medical School, McMaster University residencies in internal medicine and medical microbiology and a fellowship in infectious diseases, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program.

Shelly had an amazing career in public health and the only thing she loved more than stamping out disease and pestilence was teaching others how to do the same. As her final act of teaching, after three of her organs were donated, her brain was left to the Maritime Brain Tissue Bank.

An excerpt from Shelly's blog...



I don't know if potential medical students are still asked during interviews why they want to become a doctor. I never came up with anything more sophisticated than I just want to help people. And now, I have discovered, that is still something that drives me. And so, in the last year, I have given presentations and sat for interviews and written brochures. And the documentary, mustn't forget that, me who is camera-shy, the only way I could agree to it is knowing I would never see any of the film.

MAID. Organ donation. End of life issues. I tried to openly and honestly talk about it all.

Knowing what I know now, I wish I could go back in time and have a re-do with some of my patients.

Words and thoughts I wish I could take back. Talk less. Listen more. Give them more time for decisions, for the news to sink in. Not shake my head at what I thought was false hope. It was just hope. And that's ok.

So here is my advice for medical professionals. I was once where you were. You might someday be where I am now. So listen.

Get comfortable talking about death. All of you. Not just family physicians and palliative care. Don't project your hang ups onto your patient. Don't refer and walk away. Stick around and see them through.

Stop thinking of death as a failure. Stop talking about winning and losing. You don't have to fix everything and save everyone but you do need to help everyone. And often that help isn't a prescription or a surgery but someone to listen, to support, to be there. I know, I know, you're thinking your time is better spent on patients you can save. It's not.

Your patient may be palliative but until they are dead, they are still living. Treat them as such.





Photo credit: ID Productions

Rosvita Dransfeld is an internationally renowned documentary filmmaker who crafts powerful explorations of the human condition connecting the audience to the subjects on screen in a way that is both moving and respectful.

Dransfeld has produced two other high-profile documentaries related to organ donation and transplant, *Memento Mori* and *Vital Bonds*.

Transplanting Hope, an adaptation of *Vital Bonds*, has been nominated for an Emmy.

[Learn more about Rosvita Dransfeld](#)

ABOUT ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION IN THE CONSCIOUS COMPETENT PATIENT

Patients with illnesses that are incurable and terminal but not associated with devastating brain injury may also be conscious and competent. These patients are capable of actively participating in decisions about their end-of-life care, including decisions for withdrawal of life sustaining measures or medical assistance in dying. They also have the autonomy to make their own decisions about organ donation and are able to provide first-person consent.

While substitute decision makers and family members are welcome and encouraged to be a part of the donation conversations, consent for organ and tissue donation following MAID or WLSM is obtained directly from the conscious and competent patient.

Nearly 20 per cent of the approximately 3,000 annual MAID deaths in Canada may be eligible for deceased organ and tissue donation. Canadians are requesting organ and tissue donation after MAID, demonstrating that this is a conversation dying patients are having and a choice they are making.

In response to patient requests for organ and tissue donation after MAID and the medical community looking for guidance in these cases, Canadian Blood Services led the development of national guidance. Dr. Shelly Sarwal was one of the patient partners who participated in this work sharing her unique perspective. Through Her Last Project, Dr. Sarwal is a pioneer in bringing this conversation to the forefront.

According to current legislation, to be eligible for receiving medical assistance in dying, a person must be:

- eligible for health services funded by a government in Canada;
- at least 18 years of age and capable of making decisions with respect to your health;
- have a grievous and irremediable medical condition;
- have made a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying that, in particular, was not made as a result of external pressure; and
- give informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying.

The expert community considers organ and tissue donation a part of quality end of life care. It is their belief that a patient who chooses MAID should be given the opportunity to consider organ and tissue donation at the time of their death. Conscious and competent, these patients have the autonomy to make their own decisions and are able to provide first-person consent.



About Canadian Blood Services

Canadian Blood Services operates with a national scope and infrastructure that makes it unique within the Canadian health care system. In the domain of organs and tissues Canadian Blood Services manages programs that facilitate interprovincial organ sharing and works in collaboration with provincial programs and partners to improve the organ donation and transplantation system.

Initiatives led by Canadian Blood Services include the development of leading practices, professional education, public and professional awareness campaigns, and system performance data collection, analysis and reporting.

- Every year, thousands of Canadians are added to organ waitlists. There are more than 4,400 people waiting for organ transplants in Canada and an estimated 250 die while waiting for a transplant.
- A single organ donor can save up to eight lives. Eye and tissue donors can improve the lives of up to 75 patients.

Learn more about organ and tissue donation in Canada at blood.ca/organs-tissues



About Nova Scotia Health Authority

Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) provides health services to Nova Scotians and a wide array of specialized services to Maritimers and Atlantic Canadians. NSHA operates hospitals, health centres and community-based programs across the province. Our team of health professionals includes employees, doctors, researchers, learners and volunteers.

For more information on NSHA, please visit www.nshealth.ca

About Legacy of Life

Legacy of Life is the provincial deceased donation program for Nova Scotia. Established in 2006, the program strives to ensure every Nova Scotian knows about deceased donation and is routinely provided with the opportunity to become a donor as part of optimal end-of-life care. This is achieved through education of the public and healthcare community, adherence to leading care practices and donor family support.

For more information on Legacy of Life, please visit www.nshealth.ca/legacy-life



Media contacts

Canadian Blood Services:
1-877-709-7773 / media@blood.ca

Nova Scotia Health Authority:
1-844-483-3344 / NSHAMedia@nshealth.ca

For more information on Her Last Project and upcoming dates and locations for screenings please visit herlastproject.ca

