

I have worked as a professional Social Worker in a number of hospitals and much of that time was spent in Oncology wards. I am strongly of the opinion that doctors should be legally entitled to assist patients who are terminally ill to make end of life decisions. In my experience many terminally ill patients will accept palliative care and are well managed in this care, however there are patients that this does not apply to. I have watched a few patients where pain relief could not be adequately managed and who were crying out for an end to their lives. Much more commonly, there were patients who were very anxious to maintain control over their lives and were desperate to know how they could end their lives should their lives become intolerable. I was fortunate to know doctors who were prepared to give them this information and once they had it, the relief they showed was immeasurable. It is my belief that most did not in the end need to take advantage of this knowledge, but the fact that they felt they had some control on their future made a huge psychological difference. I watched on a number of occasions when patients with this knowledge became more relaxed, had less pain and were able to make the most of their remaining life. I know that I would want that choice, like most of the community if I am in that position at the end of my life. Many compassionate doctors already help their patients to die more quickly if they are well aware of the patient's wishes, but as this is still illegal, it places these doctors in a very stressful position. This is not fair, I believe, to the medical profession. The argument that some families may take advantage of such legislation to put pressure on the patients to decide to terminate their lives, may mean there are some risks, but I do not believe this should make such legislation impossible. Safeguards can be put in place to minimise such risks. I strongly recommend that suitable legislation be enacted.

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