

I feel very strongly that we should be able to make an informed decision about the means of ending our own lives when the future prospects for our health and happiness are unbearable.

For instance, when a person is diagnosed as being in the early stages of Alzheimer's, there should be the opportunity to request a way out before they lose the capacity to live with any dignity.

Recently, my former neighbour died after being totally incapacitated with Alzheimer's for almost 8 years. Towards the end an un-noticed cancer grew in her gum before breaking through the cheek. What dreadful pain she would have been in while incapable of communicating her distress. Finally, death would have been a tremendous relief both for her and her family.

Last year my family and I watched as our sister and our mother both died slowly, being starved and sedated for the last 3 days to 'help' them out of this world.

My friend's daughter, 50 years old, took it on herself to refuse all medication and food when she'd had enough of trying to live with her permanent, totally incapacitating illness.

What a painful, sad way to die! And agony for families to watch.

My observation of nursing home staff is that mostly they are very caring. In fact the nurse who was with Mum when she died was so kind that I wonder how she survives emotionally, having to deal with this situation so often. During the week she had cradled my 100 year old Mum, as we had, while Mum pleaded "help me, help me".

However, some staff, through youth and/or inexperience don't relate well to the distress for elderly people of losing their dignity and the capacity to help themselves. They're not always aware that the least touch can cause pain in an elderly body.

If the Government needs any more incentive to consider giving us a choice in our end of life decisions, they could look at the millions in health care and personal costs that could be saved by not dragging out a painful, unhappy existence.

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