

Inquiry into End of Life Choices.

Legal and Social Issues Committee,

To whom it may concern,

I believe that we do not need any legislative change to allow assisted suicide or euthanasia because in most cases, once it becomes legal, it is not voluntary because of the subtle pressure involved. Some years ago, a friend of mine, who was suffering from diabetes and on kidney dialysis was informed by medical staff that he had the right to refuse medical treatment and therefore he could refuse dialysis. The consequence of this decision would be death within a few days. I heard a nurse say to him, when he complained of his situation, that he didn't have to put up with it, as he knew what to do. I felt that the implication was that if he was suffering it was his fault, because all he had to do was refuse dialysis and his suffering would be over permanently. This man finally did make the decision to end his life but I always believed he felt pressured to do so but that underneath he didn't really want to. I wonder how many vulnerable people, who felt a burden to their families or to society would make similar decisions, if euthanasia was available. Surely we owe it to suffering people not to put them in that position. We need to provide high quality, compassionate palliative care for those who are terminally ill and equally good medical assistance and other aid to all who are old, infirm mentally ill or incapacitated. It has been reported that at the moment only 50% of those requiring palliative care can access it and we are all well aware of the many deficiencies in other medical services, particularly those catering for the mentally ill and the disabled.

I also would like to contend that experience overseas has shown that voluntary euthanasia can very easily become involuntary euthanasia.

I was teaching in a remote aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, when the Northern Territory rights of the terminally ill Act became law, and some of the aboriginal people were refusing to go to hospital for fear of being euthanized. Whilst such a fear seemed far-fetched at the time, these people recognised that being amongst the most vulnerable and least powerful people their lives were somehow at risk. Reports from the Netherlands and Belgium has revealed that many people are now being involuntarily euthanized at the behest of their Doctors and that the legislation has widened to include people who are not terminally ill but suffering from depression, grief and other maladies. There are proposals in Belgium for assisted suicide for children. Yes the slippery slope is alive and well and it would be a retrograde step for the whole of the Australian Community to go down that path

Let us treat each person as a worth- while human being, deserving of respect and compassionate care. Let us not create a class of people whose lives are deemed not worth living and who feel pressured to end it all. Australia can do better than that.

From Helen Fuller,

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