

From: [Inquiry into End of Life Choices POV eSubmission Form](#)
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into End of Life Choices

Ms Barbara McGarity

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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INQUIRY INTO END OF LIFE CHOICES: SUBMISSION

Please support legislation to make assisted suicide or euthanasia an option for end of life choices. Older people like myself worry a great deal about acquiring some horrible disease and having to suffer a slow and painful death, or having a stroke and lingering in a state that means life is not worth living. Please make it legal, under clear guidelines, for a medical practitioner to assist with ending our lives at a time that suits the wishes of the individual, whether by direct instruction from that individual, via earlier instructions, or through an enduring guardian. The medical practitioner should satisfy himself or herself that life for the person has become an intolerable burden and that it is not expected to change.

When I was still a student, an older cousin of mine died of throat cancer, in which the cancer gradually throttles the person: it is a horrible death, and if this happened to me I would want to decide when it became too much to bear and have a doctor-assisted death at the time of my choosing. People in my retirement village feel the same way. (For now, I am in general good health, with some mobility issues that certainly would not cause me to want to give up on life and on doing things like writing submissions!) I will tell you below of a few people who have been part of my life and how they suffered at the end of their lives, although, given the option, they would have wanted to die earlier. But first I will tell you a happy story.

1. A woman whom I knew over a long period had such fear of a bad death that she obtained and kept in her house the pills that she could take to end her life when she felt she needed to. All her friends knew of this and supported her, and she used to joke about it. The pills were there for over 20 years, though she never used them and died a peaceful death in her 90s. But she always knew that she had the means to end her life if she felt the need, and that gave her a confident sense of being in control. That confidence is what the existence of a law permitting assisted suicide or euthanasia would mean to elderly and terminally ill people. It would give peace of mind. So not only could legal

euthanasia bring release from great suffering, but it would give peace of mind to many people who might never need to avail themselves of an assisted death at all.

2. When in my 20s, I had a great and dear friend called Rae, about the same age as myself. She was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, (which has become curable in later years, so that young people are now unlikely to die from it). The diagnosing doctor told my friend only the name of the disease, so she rushed to the library to look up a medical dictionary (no computers in those days). She discovered she might have two years to live – and as it happened it was about that. In the meantime, she had long sessions of old-style x-ray for 30 days at a time with a month break between them; she stayed on at her job at first, while she could do it, but she became very weak, her skin became very burnt and suppurative, and then she developed radiation sickness, so that later she could not eat or drink. When I last saw her she gave me a wan smile, but she could not speak. She took weeks more to die. I was greatly affected by her suffering. I remember thinking all those years ago that her last year was so horrible for her that no credible God would have minded if she had been put out of her misery and had her suffering ended earlier with a lethal injection.

3. My own mother had a terrible death. She was in a nursing home, she had advanced Parkinson's disease and dementia; she had not recognised me or any of her family for a long time. Then there was an accident at the nursing home when she fell out of a wheelchair and her foot was injured. She was 87 years old. She developed gangrene, was in no condition for a doctor to agree to amputation, and the heart kept beating while the gangrene advanced up her leg. There was a born again Christian nurse there and my brother discovered that she had taken it upon herself not to administer the morphine prescribed, which upset us dreadfully. I rang the nursing home early every morning for weeks to ask if she had died in the night. Finally she did die of course. But she should never have been forced to suffer so. It was inhumane.

4. My mother's sister lived on into her 90s. I used to visit her in a nursing home. She was unable to move for the last year or more. When she transferred to the nursing home she could press the button on the remote control on the table in front of the wheel chair to turn on the television, but later she was utterly helpless and could not even do that. She begged me not to touch her – not on the hand, the shoulder or anywhere, because it was so painful. Curiously, her mind was not affected – she was as sharp as ever. Every time I visited, as I left she said goodbye and she told me that every night she prayed that she would not wake up in the morning. There was no need for her to suffer like that. She was more than ready to die.

Polls tell us that the great majority of Australians are in favour of voluntary euthanasia, with appropriate safeguards of course. A vocal minority who want to impose their particular religious beliefs on other people should not hold the population and the parliament to ransom. Nobody is asking such people to request assisted suicide or euthanasia for themselves: we would respect their right not to use such a law if that was their wish, but for their part they should respect the views and wishes of the rest of us too, and we also happen to be in the majority. Please support a euthanasia law, one that includes the necessary safeguards to prevent coercion, malpractice and abuse.

Barbara McGarity
25 July 2015

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File1:

File2:

File3: