


By email to: lsic@parliament.vic.gov.au

23 June 2015

Dear Sirs

Re: “ End of Life Choices”

As an Australian citizen, I wish to make a submission on end-of-life decision making.

MY STORY

My mother, aged 93 and living in England, was in hospital. I flew over to visit her. When my sister and I arrived to see her she was writhing in pain and she didn't recognise either of us. She was in a ward with several other patients but with a curtain around her. She had been given an oxygen mask which she kept pushing out of the way. I sat next to her and held the oxygen mask to her mouth. The writhing continued and my sister and I were horrified to think she was in so much pain. My sister called for a doctor and exclaimed “nobody would treat a dog like this” what can be done about it? My mother had been suffering with dementia for at least 3 years and had fallen and broken her hip approximately 6 weeks prior. She then contracted pneumonia and the doctor then announced that they had found my mother had a bowel obstruction and it was not recommended that they operate. As our mother was dying with pain, delirium and vomiting faecal material due to the inoperable blocked bowel, we stated we wanted our mother to go as quickly and as comfortably as possible as she had always said she would like to go once life became too unbearable. The doctor replied that because the family had requested it, they would “help her along the pathway”. We were extremely grateful for those words of comfort. My mother was then wheeled into a private room and died peacefully the next evening.

MY FRIEND'S STORY

My friend's mother, aged 94 and living Townsville, has been in and out of hospital during the past 6 months. She has macular degeneration and is almost totally blind. She lives on her own, with no relatives or friends near, in a very old double story house full of asbestos and rickety steps up to the front door. She finds it difficult to walk, is unable to look after herself properly and has been hardly eating or drinking for quite some time now. She cannot see her medication properly and my friend found many old pills trodden into the carpet and under the bed. My friend organised for her to have an emergency buzzer which she wears around neck as she had previously fallen on her lounge floor and lay there for many hours before she was found by a neighbour. My friend arranged for Blue Care to provide care for her twice a day under the Government package. That ceased and he is now paying for RSL to call in twice a day to provide her with care. This usually lasts about two days until she has to press the buzzer and calls an ambulance as she has been in severe back pain as well as being grossly constipated for a very long time and incontinent. Townsville General Hospital just administers an enema for the constipation and Paracetamol for her back pain and usually discharges her the next day. My friend has travelled up there and discussed the matter with the medicos and enquired about the possibility of his mother being put into a nursing home, but he has been told they are all full with long waiting lists. Her GP has advised him that his mother probably has a maximum of 2 months to live, but could go on longer.

In my opinion it is disgusting in this day and age that a lady of that age, who is almost totally blind, and who has kidney failure plus several other ailments, is treated in such a manner. Either she should be provided with palliative care in hospital or “helped along the pathway” as happened to my mother in England, which this lady has expressed she wants to her GP, to the carers and to doctors at the Townsville hospital, but to no avail.

- I feel that despite world-class palliative care in Victoria, it simply cannot relieve all intolerable suffering at the end of life, for some dying individuals.
- Victoria currently does not provide statutory recognition and protection for individuals’ preferences recorded in Advance Care Directives (ACD or “living wills”).
- Although I understand Victoria has world-class palliative care, it cannot possibly relieve all intolerable suffering at the end of life, for some dying individuals.
- The current law is driving desperate people to desperate self deliverance. The fact that a person may legally end their own life, but for any other person to assist under any circumstances is a crime, is illogical.
- I am nearly 71 years of age, a widow living on my own with no family. I have already had breast cancer, and if I found I was dying and suffering so much that, as part of my palliative care I needed terminal sedation (i.e. death by starvation), surely I should be able to request a quick, peaceful assisted death.
- We should all have the choice of asking for help to die if we are terminally ill and suffering intolerably. A doctor should be allowed to help me without fear of breaking the law.
- I feel it is my life and I should have the right to say when I have had enough. We put our precious animals to sleep to avoid them suffering, why do we have to suffer – sometimes for many months or even years? I therefore strongly support legalising voluntary euthanasia and medically assisted dying.

It is my understanding that Voluntary Euthanasia is legal in Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, New Mexico, and in the US, Oregon, Washington State, Montana and Vermont as well as Quebec Province in Canada. If it is possible for these countries, states and provinces to make it legal, then why not in Australia? Surely we are not expected to have to fly to Dignitas in Switzerland whilst desperately sick and in pain, or perhaps even suffering with Alzheimers, in order to end our suffering.

It is therefore my opinion that the Victorian law needs to be changed to give Victorians choice in dying, as this would ultimately benefit all Australians.

Please therefore accept this submission in support of legalising voluntary euthanasia and medically assisted dying as an “end of life” choice in Victoria.

Yours faithfully

Pauline Clegg