
From: Barbara Hasslacher
Sent: Saturday, 1 August 2015 5:14 PM
To: LSIC
Subject: Submission

31 July 2015

Lilian Topic
Secretary
Legal & Social Issues Committee Parliament House
Spring Street, Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Ms Topic

Re: Submission – Inquiry into End of Life Choices

Currently in Australia end of life choices are severely limited due to existing laws and politicians who dominate the debate or believe they have the right to dictate how the rest of us should live - and die!

In my capacity as a nurse, trained in England and having practised in New Zealand as well as Australia, I can say that palliative services, though excellent as a rule, nevertheless fall short because they cannot work miracles, and in the end, when death awaits, the difference between a 'good' death, that is relatively painless, and a bad death, is very ad hoc, to say the least.

It's a surprise to me that humans have such a hard time accepting their mortality, yet when pets are in terminal states, we don't think twice euthanasing them to eternal sleep. Why, then, do we expect our loved ones to suffer to the bitter end? It seems a pointless and unnecessary cruelty. Do we not live in civilised times?

The purported fear that any law tolerating euthanasia would be abused is a natural but erroneous concern, which has halted the appropriate debate to have a suitable law with adequate restrictions or safeguards in place.

The reality is that if someone is determined, he/she will find a way to end life, but why make these people have to resort to dying alone, or having to consider dying overseas, as in Switzerland, and not everyone would have that option as going overseas involves a certain financial disposition.

I have seen plenty of deaths which I would call painful or difficult, meaning unnecessarily protracted. Nowadays doctors are naturally fearful of being sued for behaving outside the law. Therefore laws need to protect both the doctors as well as the dying patient.

I consider it personally abhorrent that, under current laws, I would need to go to either Switzerland or Mexico if I felt my time was up, and wanted the process of death speeded up. In my opinion, my body is mine alone to decide how best to live - and die, and not at the mercy of a politician who knows nothing

about me and with whom I may share nothing in common. I dare any politician to work a few shifts with someone dying of a disease like Huntington's Chorea, where every breath becomes an effort, and who ends up being totally reliant on others for all cares, often around a young age, such as in their 40s. It's one thing to say no one should suffer, and another to see the limitations of modern medicine. Believe me, there are plenty of limitations!

In addition we need to consider the size of this country and the likely restrictions of services, depending on where one lives.

Furthermore hospices seem to have 'gone out of fashion', unfortunately. I've worked at the Sacred Heart Hospice in Sydney and was impressed with the high standard of care. Sadly, too few people are transferred there from general wards. Even in the face of death doctors (and relatives) seem reluctant to transfer their patients to such specialised places of care because it's admitting that there is nothing further that can be done, as if this is an admittance of failure. This is such a pity, because in my experience a 'good' death is an exception, rather than the rule.

Surely we can do better in this country. I hope so. Hence my writing this letter. I hope the merit of having worked 20 yrs as a registered nurse in Australia, or over 30 yrs altogether, will bear some weight. I know other doctors who feel equally strongly, and who have also made submissions.

We live in an increasingly secular world. When surveys have been done, the overwhelming majority of people have made clear their preference for more choice, to die at home rather than in hospitals, and for euthanasia when death is inevitable. So why do successive governments ignore people's choices?

I am happy to see Victoria take this initiative. I know it's a very emotive subject on both sides of the divide. It requires open-mindedness and a generous heart to see through all the likely points of view.

If you should need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely
Barbara Hasslacher RN RM