

Submission to the Victorian Government on Euthanasia Legislation

This submission is against the legalising of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide in the state of Victoria.

I have no religious views on the matter and nor am I a member of any political association. I am a grieving mother. The euthanasia debate is much more complex than just focusing on the elderly and the terminally ill. My son, [REDACTED] was advised and coached to his death by an Euthanasia company that operates freely in Victoria. He was not physically ill - terminally or otherwise. He was 26 years old.

[REDACTED] had lived away from home for 2 years and I believed he had a teaching job in Berlin. Unbeknown to me, [REDACTED] had become suicidal. He contacted Phillip Nitschke's Exit International and then became a paid-up member to the PeacefulPill website. His membership fees entitled him to access the "forum" which discussed methods for suicide exclusively. [REDACTED] was given information and advice on the best ways for him to take his own life. He was given an address in Peru in which he could source the drug Nembutal, he was then advised how to smuggle the drug back to Europe. [REDACTED] then purchased an "Exit Dilution Purity Test kit" through the Exit International Store. Later he took the drug, as per instructions, in a disused gardener's shed in Dresden, Germany.

Not at any point were questions asked of [REDACTED] as to why he would want to choose this option for himself. There was no intervention of any kind-only encouragement to obtain the drug at the best price and to find a remote location so that he would not be "rescued". He was also advised how to disguise the fact that he had taken Nembutal and given incorrect advice that it would not show up on an autopsy. Advice was also given by the resident doctor on the web site which I believe was Dr Nitschke. I find his actions to be reprehensible.

Most people who support Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide believe that it would be the "kind" thing to do for our elderly who are terminally ill and are suffering. They make assurances that with the right safe guards vulnerable citizens (the elderly, disabled and depressed) would be safe. However there are no such safeguards. None to protect people like my son [REDACTED] from zealots who have an obsession with facilitating death. I quote from the Exit International newsletter (30th May 2015) whereby Dr Phillip Nitschke states:

"The issue is no longer just about helping those who can prove they are terminally ill. It is about a much bigger issue: the right of every rational adult to a peaceful death, at a time of their choosing, and for whatever reason"

Associations like Beyond Blue work hard to provide counselling and advice to a growing number of individuals battling with mental health issues, and to reduce suicide numbers. The Euthanasia movement seems to be working harder to do the opposite, without realising the risks to our young and vulnerable. There is a serious risk to depressed people who by following this path, believe it to be sanctioned by a medical practitioner and this contributes to the "normalisation" of suicide as the answer to life's problems.

I have discussed this topic with many people since [REDACTED] preventable death in 2012. The arguments for Euthanasia, in the light of my son's story are as follows-

1. that [REDACTED], being suicidal, would have jumped off a cliff anyway.

...I am convinced that he would not have chosen that way. One way is to smash yourself to bits, and the other is to drink the drug mixed with water and fall into a comfortable deep sleep and ultimately death.

2. that with legislation and regulations, organisations like Dr Nitschke's Exit International will no longer need to exist, and that laws will "clean" up the backyard Euthanasia operators.

...this argument is also flawed and it needs the most examination. In my view, legislation is unlikely to have much impact on the activities of these type of businesses. The majority of members are attracted to the fact that it can be anonymous with no questions asked. They do not wish to be before a panel of doctors or psychologists to deem whether this is a suitable action or not. Exit International is particularly attractive to vulnerable people who suffer mental illness and depression, and many members believe that they are getting good advice from a medical practitioner.

Would any law introduced into Victoria be robust enough to hold to account those businesses (like Exit International) who, if the legislation was introduced, would in all likelihood continue to operate on the fringes of the law?

Would the powers under the legislation be strong enough to prosecute those who continue to assist with suicides i.e giving step-by-step plans, selling paraphernalia such as plastic bags for the head, nitrogen cylinders and addresses to acquire lethal drugs? Would it then be an enforceable law when individuals or companies do not comply with the legislative guidelines?

I believe that it would be extremely difficult to enforce the legislation, particularly if these businesses are based interstate or off-shore. As a result, there needs to be serious, in depth discussion also on the aspect of Euthanasia in our health system generally which I have not covered here. Clearly doctors have varied and sometimes extreme views on assisted dying.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide a submission on this very controversial issue.

[REDACTED] 27 July 2015