

Robert Mears

  
 30 July 2015

Dear Committee

Six days ago I attended the funeral of my brother-in-law. His cancer had spread from his lungs to his brain and spine. His sister, my wife, and I visited him many times in the Sunshine hospital. He died without pain. He died with dignity. With this foremost in my mind, I make the following points.

- Els Borst, who served as Health Minister for the Netherlands from 1994 to 2002, proposed the country's Euthanasia Bill. When it passed in 2001, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalise euthanasia. Els Borst now admits that the government's move was a mistake, and says that it should have first focused on palliative care. The legalisation of euthanasia came "far too early."
- Theo Boer of the Netherlands, a former euthanasia supporter warns of a surge in deaths if doctors were allowed to give deadly drugs to their patients. Professor Boer, a professional ethicist of the Utrecht University, is a Member of a Regional Review Committee charged with monitoring euthanasia deaths; he has reviewed almost 4,000 euthanasia cases. He admits he was "wrong – terribly wrong, in fact" to have believed regulated euthanasia would work. "I used to be a supporter of the Dutch law. But now, with 12 years of experience, I take a very different view."

Professor Boer says, "Whereas in the first years after 2002 hardly any patients with psychiatric illnesses or dementia appear in reports, these numbers are now sharply on the rise." He adds that many of those given euthanasia or assisted suicide were merely aged, lonely or bereaved. "Some of these patients could have lived for years or decades. Pressure on doctors to conform to patients' – or in some cases relatives' – wishes can be intense. Pressure from relatives, in combination with a patient's concern for their wellbeing, is in some cases an important factor behind a euthanasia request. Not even the review committees, despite hard and conscientious work, have been able to halt these developments."

- Here in Australia euthanasia campaigner Philip Nitschke gave suicide assistance to the depressed, rather than the dying. Cases fully investigated by coroners demonstrate that relatively few of Dr Nitschke's patients were suffering chronic physical pain or a terminal illness before their deaths; most had taken their lives for psychological reasons.
- Legislated safeguards will only be as effective as the judges who will preside over breaches of the law. A judicial slap-on-the wrist for a serious infringement will lead to unrestricted euthanasia.
- The former Governor General, Bill Hayden, has described the elderly as "unproductive burdens". The legalisation of euthanasia may well give the elderly and those incapacitated by injury or disease the clear message that they have a "duty to die".

Please do not legalise euthanasia.

Yours faithfully

Robert Mears

Mr Robert Mears

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