We can trace my Mother’s debilitating Alzheimer’s to at least 10 years before her death.

For the first four years I helped my father to care for her at home, she did not know us and thought that her husband was her father. She would repeatedly call, “I wish I could die, I wish I could die, all I want to do is die”. An aneurysm resulted in her not being able to walk and her mental capacity deteriorated intensely to the extent that the hospital informed the family that we would not be able to cope with her care and advised that she should be admitted to a nursing home. With much reluctance it was an agonising decision to make, one my father could never come to terms with as he, who was also suffering dementia, by this stage, often angrily told Mum and ourselves she had to come home. We questioned the Matron ‘are you giving drugs to Mum to control her’, the home denied it, but we were sure this was happening. This is no life for people it is a cruel, debilitating and an inhumane existence. So extremely futile and reprehensible.

For the remaining six years of her life we witnessed her gradual decline in general health and hardly heard one word from her. My father died in 1992 but even after that we continued to take Mum back to her home of 66 years as often as we could including every birthday and Christmas. My mother had been an active, extremely house proud and immaculate woman so when my husband and I had to feed her and then lift her out of the wheelchair on to her bed to change her incontinence pad and clean her it broke my heart to witness the humiliation in her eyes. I don’t think it was my imagination, I’m sure it was humiliation in this once very proud woman’s eyes.

In Mum’s final days it was harrowing to listen to the death rattle coming from her emaciated body. To be blunt, she starved to death.

No person should have to suffer such pain, indignity and humiliation it is cruel to all concerned, we do not let our pets or farm animals suffer in this way.

My husband and I have signed Enduring Powers of Attorney –Medical, plus ‘Refusal of Treatment’ forms for ourselves even though we are fully aware that these directives can be overlooked which is of great consternation to us in our advancing years.

I have barely scraped the surface in relating the trauma of my parents ageing years, I could write a book! The anguish, the confusion, the tears, the exhaustion, the sleepless nights over many years, the near tearing apart of my own family whilst I was also caring for one of our sons who was diagnosed with cancer.

It terrifies us to think that our final years could be the same. We must be allowed to determine our own destiny and have the right to “die with dignity”.

Margaret and Michael Waddington