SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL
ISSUES IN REGARD TO THE INQUIRY INTO END OF LIFE CHOICES

From
Susanne Pearce

I am a 70-year old person, in good health, living independently, enjoying life with
cultural pursuits and travel, and quite heavily involved in volunteer work. When
employed I held very senior positions in science and public service. I have a good
circle of friends of similar age but no children – other family live in other
Queensland.

My only concern is how to handle my own death so that I have choice and control
over the manner of it and can die in a dignified way.

While I have a signed an Advanced Healthcare Directive and Power of Attorney
(Medical) Medical I spend far too much time worrying about the possibility of my life
being needlessly prolonged and my suffering extended by people whose views on life
are different to mine, and in planning how to avoid this. I also wish not to have to
worry that any physician who might assist me could be in legal jeopardy.

I want to enjoy the next decade or two without such concerns. They weigh heavily
on my mind. If the law would allow me, as the end of my life draws near, to have
the option to take prescribed medication to end my life (within strict guidelines) an
enormous weight would be off my mind.

Request:
I request that the Committee recommend the Law be changed so that medically
assisted dying is legal (under strict guidelines as in countries such as the Netherlands).

Elaboration
In some cases, especially in palliative care institutions, dying people are spoon fed (or
worse have a feeding – plug), both of which only prolong suffering, or are revived to
continue to suffer. Sometimes the patient is placed in a medically-induced coma – but
with insufficient morphine or sedatives given to definitely cause death, thus leading to
a slow, drawn-out process as the body shuts down, rather than a quick ending. How
ridiculous and irrational is that!

Such palliative care stems usually from a Christian or other religious belief system,
that is, from the imposition on me of a belief system that is not mine. The patient can
only, if they have the willpower and strength, refuse food – an action which also leads
to a slow lingering dying with prolonged suffering.

For the medical professional, fear of prosecution must be another strong factor.
I have read arguments that any legal guidelines will not be ironclad, that the rate of suicide will increase, that families will collude in the death of their parent, partner etc.

I have read reports from other countries where assisted dying is legalised. Evidence does not support these concerns.

A case example:
My mother was dying at age 87 of liver cancer as a secondary cancer from breast cancer. She was legally blind having had macular degeneration for some decades. She was also completely deaf in one ear and often had infections in her “good” ear. In the last couple of months of her life, she would beg me to “do something”. How wonderful it would have been if, with her family around her, she could have said farewells and been assisted to sleep to die. Instead she lingered on – very distressing for her and for her family.

In summary I wish the law to be changed so that it is legal to have the option of medically-assisted dying, with no jeopardy for the physician.

This current legal situation regarding end of life is not good enough.