End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Frances A. Nixon

I register my absolutely disapproval of Margo MacDonald's End of Life Assistance Bill

It is broadly based, vague, full of euphemisms, ambiguities and open to interpretation.

It would legalise euthanasia.

The ambiguous definitions of terminally ill and physically incapacitated means that thousands of ill and disabled people throughout Scotland would fall within its remit. A permanently physically incapacitated person is defined, as someone physically disabled who cannot live life independently. This covers many thousands of Scottish men, women and children.

Safeguards are seriously defective. There is no provision for review of implementation or for the installation of a regulatory body responsible for making checks on the assisted deaths carried out. If nothing is in place to audit the implementation of what the bill proposes safeguards are ineffective.

Why has a different age from the age of majority has been chosen? Can a 16 year old make such a grave decision? Breaking up with a friend, family disputes and exam failure can evoke “end of the world” thoughts in a teenager.

The bill does not specify acceptable or appropriate means of ending a life. Deeply worrying.

It has many indefinable risks to the vulnerable children and adults who can be pressured or manipulated into wanting to die. Safeguards on paper cannot guarantee their safety. It also presents pressures for the elderly, sick and disabled to feel burdensome and compelled to feel a “duty” to die.

It proposes dramatic and fundamental changes to the role of doctors making them more powerful and risking manipulation and abuse. The Bill contains no specified procedures by which doctors would report their involvement with an assisted suicide. A meaningful audit of how the law was working would be highly problematic.

The absence of a ‘conscience clause’ means that health care professionals and doctors do not have the legal right to decline assisting dying.

The bill violates Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights which states that ‘Everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law’
It misconstrues the definitions of dignity of life and compassion. Dignity is the intrinsic worth of a human being, not measured by ability, quality of life, or intellect. Compassion means to suffer with someone, not kill him or her off.

If the underlying principle of such a law is to allow for 'patient autonomy', why is the privilege of choosing death over life bestowed only on those who fulfil the eligibility requirements within the bill. The bill discriminates between those who are right in wanting to die and those who are wrong in wanting to die.

The Bill is intended to 'enable a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress' something already provided through good health care and palliative medicine.

The bill undermines the demand for palliative care. Once assisted suicide and euthanasia are made legal, palliative care, medical research and the hospice movement would become redundant. Why strive to find life saving cures or invest in palliative care when the bill offers a low cost alternative to life saving treatments?

The proposed bill gives some human beings too much power over the life of others.

This combined with the failure and laxity of safeguards makes for a worrying and dangerous set of precedents. If we allow something seen as relatively harmless now, we take the path that can end in something currently unthinkable becoming acceptable later.

As there are never enough hospital beds, medicines, doctors and nurses to meet the demand, perhaps the idea to kill off the old and sick near the end of their life, would be an ideal solution for some!

Evidence from the Netherlands and the American State of Oregon, where assisted suicide is currently legal, shows that it is impossible to prevent abuses and complications from occurring.

Medical insurance clauses have been changed to reflect that a person will not be covered for life saving and expensive drug treatment for serious medical ailments, but they will be covered for an assisted death.

Around 1000 people die every year without explicitly requesting and consenting to legalised death. Almost half are shown to be incompetent.

Mrs Els Borst the former Dutch minister who successfully promoted the legalization of euthanasia admitted that the government’s move was a mistake, and that they should have first focused on palliative care. “In the Netherlands, we first listened to the political and societal demand in favour of euthanasia,” she said. “Obviously, this was not in the proper order.”

We, the people of Scotland, are on the brink of a grave and detrimental cultural shift. A road that would change all of our lives in ways yet unknown.
Please do not let Scotland take that route

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