End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Rev C Brian Ross

With regard to the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill, submitted by Ms Margo MacDonald, MSP, and currently before the Committee, I wish to make the following representations.

I have read, carefully, through the Bill, and my copy is well annotated! However, I would draw to the Committee’s attention only the following sample of the many questions which, I believe, are raised by the Bill.

1. **Section 1. (2).**
   I would submit that “appropriate means” is a vague wording that, notwithstanding the terms of Section 10. (1), (d), leaves the option of any kind of unusual, and bizarre, requests being made. I also note that, in Section 11. (1), such agreement must be provided only “so far as [is] reasonably practicable”.

2. **Section 4. (1), (b).**
   This sub-section is, in my opinion, an invitation to unscrupulous people to register medical practices solely for the purpose of legitimising the terms of the Bill. Sub-section (4) is also, I would submit, impracticable. I am reminded that a certain Mr Megrahi was permitted to be released from his lawful imprisonment in this country, on the basis that he had only three months to live. His continuing existence, more than eight months later, indicates the inability of doctors to give a truly accurate prognosis. One of my father’s cousins was told, at nineteen years of age, that she had only six months to live. She outlived her eventual husband, and was in her late sixties when she died!

3. **Section 6. (2).**
   One would have to question the notion, in such a serious context, that the requesting person’s understanding, etc. ((a), (b), (c)) should merely be “…to the best of the witness’s knowledge and belief …”

4. **Section 7. (1), (d).**
   I find it strange – to say the least – that the requesting person should be discussing “the forms of end of life assistance which may be provided.” As suggested at 1. above, this leaves the door wide open. When, and by whom, would “acceptable” options be provided – or would any bizarre request be acted upon? See also 9. (2), (d) and 10. (1), (d).

5. **Section 9. (4), (d)**
   How might anyone ensure that a person is capable of “retaining the memory of such a decision.”? I am certainly capable of retaining the memory of events and decisions just now. However, I could not guarantee that I would be capable of remembering a decision made now, in twenty years’ time!
6. Additional points

(a) I recently provided pastoral care for a lady who was dying from cancer of the bowel. She had requested that she be sent home to die. Her family, the District Nursing Staff, and all who were dealing with her, showed a level of care that, allowing for the circumstances, was beautiful to watch. At no time did she give any hint that she wished to end her life prematurely. She died, peacefully – but happily, knowing that she was at home, and surrounded by her family.

(b) This is not the first time that this issue has been raised in both the Holyrood, and Westminster, Parliaments. The clearly expressed will in both places is that any move towards assisted suicide/euthanasia should be firmly opposed. Perhaps Ms MacDonald is hoping that the EU syndrome of “Keep asking until you get the answer you want” will kick in!

It is my sincere hope that the Committee will not offer its support to this Bill.

C. Brian Ross (Rev)
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