End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Elisabeth Sammon

I believe this bill is intended to ‘enable a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress’. My husband and I looked after both our mothers in their old age.

My husband’s mother, Mary, lived with us for seven and a half years (four of those with my mum also in the house) before breaking her hip and dying seven weeks later. She had been physically frail for some years but mentally very good till the last two years of her life when she had mild senile dementia. She lived with us in a granny flat and gradually I became her full time carer. She always received good care from the health service, having, while living with us, a mastectomy and later a stroke from which she recovered fully. After she broke her hip and had a femoral head replacement she remained in hospital where she received good treatment which we thought would enable her to return home. However she was unable to eat and drink enough to promote healing. She had several infections which were successfully treated with antibiotics and rehydration by drip. But she still could not drink enough and we realised her body was giving up so requested that no further interventions should be given. She was carefully nursed and died peacefully of natural causes soon afterwards, aged 87, with dignity and a minimum of distress.

My mother, Sheila, lived with us too but she had Alzheimer’s disease. She was physically fit and able to begin with but gradually needed help with all acts of daily living, including feeding. She was 90 when I could no longer manage her care and she went into a nearby nursing home. She settled well there and was tenderly cared for, for one and a half years, before she had a brief chest infection and died in the care home with dignity and a minimum of distress.

I realise of course that not everyone may receive the excellent care that Mary and Sheila received. However, I know that if there was the possibility of ending a life such as they had, in order to lessen the strain on me and the cost to the country, I would have felt a great pressure on me to choose such an end for them. How glad I am that I did not have such pressure exerted on me by well meaning friends and family. There was time during their last days for family to visit and express their love and give support to me and my husband. We have no feelings of guilt to cope with and know we did all we could do for them. This is very important for relatives and also for medical staff involved and must not be underestimated.

I would like to live in a caring, loving society which does not see the old or disabled or terminally or chronically ill as problems to be dealt with, but as precious people who will be looked after in the best possible way till their life’s end.
I know that some who are suffering, like Margo Macdonald, with whom I have every sympathy, will want to have control over their own final days, but I see no way of allowing that and at the same time protecting and providing for others. Please take great care as you make far reaching decisions for Scotland. God promises to give wisdom to those who ask for it, so I will pray for wisdom for you all.

Elisabeth Sammon
22/04/2010