End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Mrs Theresa Archibald

I understand that you are considering evidence from organisations and individuals with regard to the above Bill. I am not an expert but my mother is very elderly and suffers from (moderate) Alzheimer's. Thus I do have a particular concern about end of life issues.

My first concern would be to do with the scope of the Bill being extremely wide and it would seem to offer assisted suicide across the board to those who may be to some degree dependent on others. Now, my mother is completely dependent on others but I would hate her to feel that she is a burden in any way, or that her life is not worth living, or that it is not as "valuable" as anyone else's because she is dependent on others and has Alzheimer's. I believe this Bill would put vulnerable people at risk (as has happened in the Netherlands).

The second issue I wish to pick up on is the use of the word "dignity", eg the Bill is intended to "enable a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress". This makes it sound as if other deaths somehow lack "dignity". The correlation seems to be being made between suicide and "dignity", which I think is false and seems to diminish the efforts of our National Health Service to care for people well in the last stages of their lives, and more particularly the efforts of palliative care professionals. As you know, this is an area of medicine in which great progress continues to be made.

Thirdly, I would be extremely concerned if Scottish doctors were expected to accede to patients' requests for assisted suicide. I understand that at present there is no "conscience" clause allowing health professionals to opt out of implementing the proposals of this Bill. This would be unthinkable!

Theresa Archibald (Mrs)

28 April 2010