End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

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As a Consultant Surgeon in Shetland I often have terminally ill patients under my care as there are no locally available palliative care beds. With the assistance of my ward nursing team, McMillan nurses and Consultant Anaesthetists, I have no difficulty in "enabling a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress". For those who wish to die at home, the island has a McMillan nurse who visits the patient at home. And where longer term palliative care as an inpatient is required, a single room in our long stay ward under the overall care of a consultant physician is available. Quality end of life care is thus available even in the most remote part of Scotland.

The doctor patient relationship is already complicated enough without adding the role of executioner. For many elderly patients, this additional fear may make the difference between them seeking medical assistance or suffering at home. Thus a Bill designed to supposedly reduce suffering will actually increase suffering.

The vast majority of the medical profession do not support assisted suicide. The proposed bill has no "conscience clause". I, and many of my colleagues, will not take any part in assisting suicide or providing the means to a patient to do so. If that means breaking some ill conceived future law in Scotland, then so be it. Experience with legal assisted suicide in the Netherlands has shown that it is impossible to prevent abuses. My aim as a doctor is to preserve life, not to take it. If this bill becomes law, Scotland will lose many of its finest doctors.

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