End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

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I wish the following to be considered:-

All human beings are worthy of dignity and respect and should be cared for throughout their lives. People nearing the end of their lives need to know that we are committed to caring for them and doing all that we can to enable as full and meaningful a life as possible until the point of death, even if this does involve expenditure of time and money. Assisted dying, as proposed gives the message that an individual’s life may reach a point where they or we are allowed to consider it not worth the effort.

As a pharmacist I am involved in provision of medicines and advice on administration of medicines to maintain life. The people with whom I deal appear to me to wish to maintain life (sometimes at all costs) and even when death has been accepted as inevitable, the desire is to maintain life in the most meaningful way possible until the point of death. In the majority of instances where professional help is sought, it is possible for a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress. If on the other hand as a professional I was called on to give advice on the medicines and dose of the same to achieve death, I could not do this. I note that this bill does not contain any “conscience clause” to allow doctors and other professionals to opt out.

I also understand that the bill as it is proposed fails to define what it is to “find life intolerable”. This may differ greatly from one person to the next and yet a doctor as the prescriber of medicines intended to end life is responsible to assess that the patient is reasonable in their request. Only a few years back we had the situation where Dr Shipman “assisted” a number of elderly patients to end their life apparently for his own gain. Could this be the “loophole” for his successor? And then the means to ending a life is not apparent within this bill. While it might be easy to assume a simple lethal dose of a certain drug may be intended, it is not specified and so will it equally be acceptable for a bullet from a gun to do the necessary?

As a Christian I do not believe that we hold the right to make a decision as to the time of death as our view of an individual’s circumstances are very limited and prone to change. I find it more comfortable to leave this issue with our God who sees the whole of our life span and has provided the resources required by us to live that out.

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