End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Hamish Goldie-Scot

I will by this letter to express my concern about the above Bill on the following grounds.

- As a result of the imprecise language used, its scope is much broader than intended even by its few supporters, increasing the risk of it being the thin edge of the wedge in moving Scotland down the path of wholesale voluntary euthanasia.
- The Bill is vague and contains numerous euphemisms and ambiguities. Crucially, there is no definition of what it is to find life 'intolerable', and the methods by which life would be legally terminated are not identified.
- The bill is not clear on what means can be used to end a person's life.
- The proposed safeguards are seriously defective. Among others, there is real doubt that the suggested medical assessments would be sufficient to discern that the patient is not under external pressure to request assisted suicide.
- The Bill contains no specified procedures by which doctors would report their involvement with an assisted suicide. This undermines any prospect of a meaningful future audit of how the law is, or is not, working.
- It places responsibility for providing "end of life assistance" on the shoulders of Scottish doctors, for whom it contains no 'conscience clause'. The majority of health care professionals would not be prepared to participate in implementing the proposals of the Bill, thus potentially over time risking the criminalisation of ethical professional behaviour.

At a more fundamental level, this is an unnecessary and dangerous Bill. Unnecessary because it aims to 'enable a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress', an objective that is already provided for through good health care and particularly palliative medicine. And dangerous because it crosses the line in undermining the basic principle of the inherent value of human life.

In objecting to this Bill I am respectful of the fact that some proponents of assisted suicide have formulated their views in what is undoubtedly a caring and careful manner. In the case of my own family I have known what it is like to see loved ones "wanting to go". Despite this, I do not consider there to be a case for the legal changes proposed by this Bill, at the heart of which is a rejection of the essential value of human life.

Hamish Goldie-Scot
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