End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill
Isabel Macleod et al

The Bill is short and can be read in a few minutes reflecting how basic the provisions are. There is a vague reference to ‘dying with dignity’ in the first section. The Bill gives no indication of what exactly this means and how it will be achieved. There is no specific means of ending the life of the requesting person in the Bill and it appears to allow both euthanasia and assisted suicide - a troubling prospect. The End of Life Assistance Bill is dangerous and should not be enacted. The safeguards found in the Bill seek to protect the people of Scotland if it were enacted, however, these safeguards are not sufficient to prevent people from abusing the system.

The Bill assumes that everyone has a right to decide when they want their lives to end and in so deciding, they will automatically be given consideration by a doctor to help them end their lives. This proposition goes against hundreds of years of medical ethics. Legalising euthanasia would undermine the role of medicine in our society. The traditional and proper role of the doctor as the life saver and life sustainer will be reversed when they are trained to kill under the provisions of this proposed law. The doctor-patient relationship will be broken, leaving people unsure about their doctor - the one they could at one time trust with their lives.

Scotland offers high quality palliative care which provides pain relief as well as social, psychological and spiritual support to people at the end of their lives. This successful system should be supported. The law has an important role to protect vulnerable citizens. Introducing legalised euthanasia would go against this principle. The law should protect the people of Scotland, especially the vulnerable, and not the determined few that wish to see their lives coming to an end on their own terms.

The Bill sets the minimum age to request assistance to die at sixteen. This would be a dangerously young age to have the power to decide to die. It is significant that the English government has refused to back this type of Bill. If the End of Life Assistance Bill was passed in Scotland it would leave great inconsistencies between the laws of the two countries. It would encourage people to migrate across the border to live in Scotland for the required time before proceeding to end their lives under the Bill.

Terminally ill is defined as suffering from a progressive condition which leads to a reasonably expected death in six months. It is very difficult to determine how long a person with an incurable illness will survive for and often doctors’ predictions are outlived. These people may not even feel unwell but in fearing they’ll soon become a burden to loved ones or be trapped in a lifeless body may decide it is better to die sooner rather than later.

The definition of those permanently physically incapacitated is also dangerous. This category is so wide it could potentially include a large
number of disabled people, many of whom are happy to continue living with their disability. At present they are under no pressure to die to relieve loved ones of the tasks that are required to be done for them on a daily basis. Yet, if this Bill was to become the law, they may feel as if their lives have become worthless, and so, end up with a desire to be killed, relieving their loved ones of these tasks.

The introduction of abortion into UK legislation in 1967 effectively caused a system of abortion on demand. The introduction of the End of Life Assistance procedure into the Scottish legal system could create a similar system. It could all too easily become a form-filling exercise with no sufficient steps to regulate who is to receive the treatment. To provide end of life assistance to not only terminally ill people but also those with degenerative illnesses, those who are incapacitated after accidents and even those who ‘find life intolerable’ is effectively creating a system which provides for euthanasia on demand.

Christianity holds that human life is sacred as each human being has been made in the image of God. Humans have been entrusted with the life given to them and should ensure it is cared for and preserved in all situations. There is a moral duty to care for all human life to its natural or God ordained end. It is the Christian belief to hold that humans are made and looked after by an infallible God and it is by his timing humans pass into eternity. Many, not only of the Christian belief, see the calls for assisted suicide and legalised euthanasia as a step towards trying to act as God.

The legal and moral implications to such a law far surpass any advantages pro-euthanasia supporters claim are found in such a law. Life is precious and should be protected by the state. Enacting a means of bringing someone’s life to an end sits morally uncomfortably among many people. The intentional killing of another should never be made legal in Scotland.

For all these reasons the Bill should be rejected.

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