Overview of the history of Assisted Suicide proposals

This Bill was introduced into the Scottish Parliament by Jeremy Purvis a few years ago. Having heard Mr. Purvis talk about the Bill, my most enduring memories are that firstly, he was pursuing this Bill not because of his Party’s interest, nor his Constituents (who seemed, from what he said, to oppose it) but because of his own inclination towards the idea. His inclination seemed to be driven by previous extended family experience of death. Secondly, at the same meeting, at which there were disabled people, it became apparent that Mr. Purvis hadn’t consulted with disabled people before introducing his proposals and those disabled people attending were asking for ‘assisted living’ not ‘assisted dying’. This made me think that Mr. Purvis ideas were perhaps naïve and that perhaps he was unaware of the priorities of those with degenerative conditions and disabilities. I think real discernment and empathy should be of major importance when considering this important issue. Mr Purvis seemed, on this occasion, not to have considered the issue in any real depth.

After Mr. Purvis failed to get his proposals any further, Margo MacDonald took over the idea from him. Ms. MacDonald had not previously favoured any kind of Euthanasia and seems to have become attracted to the notion fairly recently, perhaps influenced by her own medical issues. I’m actually surprised that it wasn’t deemed that there may be a conflict of interests in Ms. MacDonald’s case and that perhaps she wasn’t the person to take this issue forward. Having subsequently been at a meeting where she spoke about her proposals, she certainly didn’t come across as objective, didn’t take constructive criticism well, acknowledged the problems of the legislation but didn’t offer any solutions.

Social Considerations

I’ve subsequently tried to debate the issue with M.S.P.s who supported the Bill and still feel unconvinced that there is any real objectivity from its supporters past and present. One supporting M.S.P. merely responded to my concerns by saying he did not share my views. Another M.S.P. denies that there are any major problems resulting from existing Euthanasia laws in other countries. But I’ve been made aware of issues such as:

- Involuntary deaths (e.g. in Holland)
- Unethical deaths where doctors have had no real relationship with patients before assisting their suicide (e.g. in Oregon)
- Illegal euthanasia, when people are assisted to die who are not terminally ill (e.g. in Switzerland)
- Disabled children being killed (e.g. in Holland, Groningen protocol 2002)
Personal Considerations

I have a child who has a disabling and degenerative condition. She therefore survived the 1990 law re ‘severely handicapped’ babies which would have meant that detection of her condition pre-birth would have led to professionals offering me a termination using the guidelines provided to them (N.I.C.E guidelines on antenatal care 1.7.1.2) which suggest termination as the first option when any foetal anomaly is detected, which I believe is discriminatory. As the Government spend such a high budget on the screening process, implementing the 1990 law, neither the Government nor the Association of Medical Research Charities (A.M.R.C.) intend to research a cure for her condition. Hopefully she will also survive this too, as at least progress in other fields of medicine will benefit her.

If Euthanasia in any form is introduced will she be part of a target group for those most likely to ‘benefit’ from the opportunity for assisted suicide? How many times does she have to try to survive discrimination in law? My daughter has a very full life, she attends mainstream school and progresses at her own rate, why are people like this deemed to be better off dead?

The terms disability, handicap and degenerative conditions project emotive feelings among many, but we have to remember that people are more than the sum of their parts, and I think this should be recognised in law as it is in society.

Conclusion

Perhaps those who have been flying the flag for these proposals are too close to the issue and need to step back and look at the bigger picture. Even for those with no moral or ethical objections to an introductory form of assisted suicide, there are too many major problems for it to be fair and workable in Law for any age group or condition and no-one has proved otherwise, as examples have shown.

Anonymous
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