I do not agree that a person should be able to request end of life assistance from a registered medical practitioner. My reasons are as follows:

- The role of the medical practitioner should never include the taking of life or assisting another to take his/her own life. This Bill, if it becomes law, will alter forever the basic relationship of trust between doctor and patient. No doctor should ever be asked to perform such a role. While some will undoubtedly refuse, others (perhaps less well-established and less experienced ones) may feel pressured into it before regretting it later on.
- This Bill will indirectly but necessarily implicate others in such activity, e.g. nurses, administrators. By involving so many people in the ending of human life, it will tend to lower the value we place on human life as a society.
- This Bill will lead to a shift in emphasis away from palliative care.
- This Bill will help create a mindset that a life is only worth living and sustaining if it has a certain quality to it. The dangers of such thinking are obvious.
- Elderly sick people may feel an obligation or pressure to cease to be a ‘drain on society’.

16 is an incredibly young age to be able to make such a request. While legally an adult, a 16 year old usually has a lot of maturing ahead of them and perspectives on the value and purpose of life often alter with age.

The categories of qualifying persons are very wide. Also, I am at a loss to know how a doctor is supposed to be satisfied – given the gravity of what is at stake - that a patient finds life “intolerable” or that there has been no “undue influence”.

The consent and verification process, and the safeguards, offer no real comfort in the face of this worrying proposal. Procedures in any walk of life, while devised with good intentions, are often reduced to tick-box exercises over time as familiarity sets in. If this Bill is to become law, we must be realistic and acknowledge that errors and abuses will occur and that we are heading down a slippery slope to who knows where. I do not look forward to becoming a vulnerable person in a society where the proposals in this Bill form part of the legal landscape.

Steven Inglis
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