End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Anonymous

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

I would respectfully suggest that for this bill to be presented by someone visibly affected by illness creates a groundswell of sympathy for it before a word is said. It does not create a level playing field of impartiality for a fair and measured debate on a subject of such enormous importance.

I offer the following for your consideration: Over the last four years I have had four close family bereavements, all preceded by long and difficult illnesses and frailties. When someone you love is suffering, you also suffer. In each case I was present at the time of death, or very shortly afterwards. My mother-in-law died last year. Inappropriate interventions were withdrawn, we took it in turns to simply be there, to hold her hand, to offer what love we could until her life came to its natural end. My own mother, like everyone else who knew and cared about my mother-in-law, was aware of the circumstances of this death. Some months later she had a stroke from which she was not to recover.

My question is this. Supposing my mother, gravely ill and surrounded by her family, knew that my mother-in-law had already been ‘assisted’ to die, how SECURE would she feel? Or again, if she knew the doctor or nurse coming to treat her had come from ‘assisting’ the patient in the next room to die, how SAFE would she feel? Or what if she had been able to put pressure on us in the long unhappy months prior to her stroke to ‘assist’ her to hasten the end? All of us, thankfully, knew this was not an option. The grieving process is enormous as it is, without this possibility, which is surely not only about the patient but affects a wide circle of survivors – spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, future generations, friends – and it would most certainly affect those medical staff obliged to be involved in the ‘assisting’.

You will note my reservations about the nice soft word ‘assist’. What you are really talking about is KILLING. And somebody would have to do it.

- I suggest the implementation of this legislation would lead to great insecurity and lack of confidence by patients in doctors and nurses, in fact it would change the relationship fundamentally and permanently. It is against the Hippocratic Oath.
- It is far from clear what the aftermath would be for the survivors, be they family, friends, or health professionals. There is evidence that abortion, which is another form of ‘assisted’ death, leaves an aftermath of pain, guilt and depression for many, many people.

In conclusion, I am deeply grateful that in all my bereavements good palliative care was available for my loved ones. It was a privilege, even in the heartache and distress, to share those last moments together. It was holy
ground. I am deeply grateful that through this extremely difficult time, none of us had the option of hastening end of life.

Mrs Pat Leiper

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