End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Edith Smith

Having been born in and having lived in Scotland for the major part of my life, I am very concerned about the impact this bill might have on my own life in later years and on the Scottish society.

I firmly believe that if we as a civilised society accept assisted suicide or euthanasia, it means that some lives would no longer have any meaning or worth.

The scope of the bill is extremely broad as it would offer assisted suicide to people who are dependent even in a small way on others and as a result old and / or vulnerable people would be at risk. As far as I can see, the Bill doesn't make clear what it means to “find life intolerable” – after all, just as every individual is different, so each individual idea of what that phrase means eg. people can tolerate different levels of pain and other limitations.

I know the bill is intended “to enable a person to die with dignity and a minimum of distress”. However, in my experience this is already provided through good health care and in particular in palliative medicine and many I know have benefitted from the care and compassion that was shown to them by the health professionals and others.

I believe the professional medical bodies and the British Medical Association do not support assisted suicide. I am also very concerned that the Bill places responsibility for providing “end of life assistance “ on the shoulders of the Doctors in Scotland and yet it contains no “conscience clause”. What a responsibility and even more importantly, what an overwhelming burden they may have to bear for months and years to come afterwards if they have to “assist someone to end his or her life” when in fact they sincerely believe and their own conscience clearly indicates to them that assisting in this way is wrong.

I also believe that in many countries where assisted suicide is legal, there is evidence to show that it is impossible to prevent abuses happening.

Therefore, I sincerely ask the committee to give further consideration to this matter as you prepare and present your report to Parliament.

Finally, I realise that as at present I am fit and healthy, this view may seem rather hypothetical. However, I have had the experience of caring for and then when I was unable to care for them adequately, witnessing at first hand the care given to several elderly members of my family including my own parents and my mother in law, when in their 80’s and 90’s. I have also witnessed the care given to a few younger people who as a result of serious illness were very dependent on others for their daily needs. I can honestly say that the care, kindness and compassion shown to each one was of a very high
standard and was appreciated both by those who received the care and myself. I know that not once did they desire assistance to have their life ended. After all, life is very precious.

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