

Assisted Dying Bill, Scotland Flyer 1

You may have seen TV news stories which highlight emotionally difficult experiences of people dealing with hard situations, who want the law to allow them to end their life. Popular soaps and other dramas often present the impression that allowing people to end their own life should be up to the individual. We are led to feel that it should be their right??

The above bill is now before the Scottish parliament. It proposes that people who are facing a “bad death” due to having a terminal illness, should have the right to be supported in ending their own life.

The bill proposes certain safeguards: Two doctors must agree that the person is capable and fits legal criteria; a 14 day period to allow a change of mind; a health care professional must assist the “patient” in taking the drugs that will kill them. Some feel this is reasonable and humane?

The gravest concern regarding this bill is not its proposals that might seem reasonable to many, even though they are a concern. It's greater danger lies in what will happen to people in Scotland after it became law, especially those who experience vulnerability or disability in their lives.

Other Countries Where Assisted Suicide is Legal Today

Holland, Canada and some states in USA allow legal Assisted Dying/Suicide. Before the law was changed in these countries, people were given proposals like the Scotland Bill which

- Said the reason for change was only to support a limited number of people facing a terminal illness, from which they had no other escape
- And promised that this act of legal Dying/Suicide would be controlled and supervised

Today the law in these countries is very different from this. It no longer applies only to a small group in the population with terminal illness. Many more, different types of people are now legally killed.

- Holland allowed euthanasia in 2001 when most of 2000 cases were to provide relief of pain/cancer
- By 2019, of the 7000 deaths, more than 500 were due to dementia/psychiatric conditions.
- In 2020 the Dutch government agreed to the euthanasia of children under 12.
- In April 2020 the court in Holland acquitted a doctor of murder who carried out euthanasia on a dementia patient who resisted.

Canadians agreed assisted Dying/Suicide in 2016, for those experiencing suffering near the end of life. They expected this would involve low numbers of people. Over the past 5 years the law there has changed

- The 5 day period to change decision can be removed
- A person can now be considered eligible for Dying/Suicide due to chronic illness, disability, mental illness, or anything that would hinder their full participation in society.

Over time, people use equality laws (which say that everyone has to be able to have what some people have) to widen the use of assisted Dying/Suicide. In these countries, legally assisted Dying/Suicide is now part of the “treatments” offered by health care services. Think about how this changes so many things.

Scotland in the Future

As we have seen from the experience of other countries, legalised killing is a danger to those who struggle or are vulnerable. Giving a person lethal drugs as a way of dealing with their life is always an indication of failure, it does not dignify the person.

In Scotland today carers try to help people face and overcome illness or difficulty in their lives. These other countries show us how legal assisted Dying/Suicide undermines this. It changes the way that people understand and treat others when they are vulnerable. In a number of these countries which now allow assisted Dying/Suicide, many people (especially the vulnerable) agree to this because they “feel as if they are a burden” to others.

Good laws also need other supports in place for people who help others face difficulty or challenges. Helping someone experiencing mental health issues, drugs/alcohol dependency, or a relative facing end of life challenges, need resources. (e.g. Hospices and good quality palliative care can ensure that no person need experience unnecessary pain.)

If this bill is made law it is a danger to Scottish society as a whole. Other countries show us that, what may appear reasonable for a few is bad law for all. Legalised killing as a way of “caring” for people, paves the way for later decisions that change what health care is, and how it is delivered. It affects the role of doctors and nurses. It changes how we value and care about each other.

“Administering death is cheaper and easier than providing care, and it will quickly become the solution for any forms of human suffering, as we have seen in Canada.”

Dr Leonie Herx, chair of the division of palliative medicine at Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada.

The votes of MSPs decide the laws of Scotland. For an issue like this, they have a responsibility to make laws that look after the good of everyone, especially the most vulnerable. To vote well they should only think about facts, the good of all, and not about opinion polls or popularity. Their vote will leave all people in Scotland with a legacy that will last for a long, long time.

Action – What You Can Do If You Are Concerned

- Copy this document and pass it to family, friends or others, especially in other parts of Scotland. Ask them to share and speak with others, contact their MSP, share concern and ask how they will vote. They can do this online at www.writetothem.com using only their postcode.
- Log on to the website www.carenokilling.scot and sign the petition, and find out more facts about this issue. This website can also help you contact your MSPs.
- Write to your MSP as a constituent and ask them to vote against this legislation.

By taking action, you will play an important part in building a network of action across Scotland. Action can bring about a legacy of care for future generations, not killing. Failure to act could leave future generations with a disastrous legacy. Let us know about your contacts with MSPs by phone or txt to the number below.

NOTE : Our campaign group is not affiliated to any political party or group, it was formed to respond to this particular issue. To find out more phone or text Brian on 07947 497 797.